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Full Name of Author — Nom complet de l'auteur
ATTRIDGE, Robert James

Date of Birth — Date de naissance July 3, 1953	Country of Birth — Lieu de naissance Canada

Permanent Address — Résidence fixe
#607-10101 Saskatchewan Drive
Edmonton, Alberta
T6E 4R6

Title of Thesis — Titre de la thèse
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WILLIAM CARLOS WILLIAMS' CONTACT THEORY: AMERICAN AESTHETICS

by

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ROBERT JAMES ATTRIDGE

A THESIS

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "William Carlos Williams' Contact Theory: American Aesthetics" submitted by Robert James Attridge in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Bert L. Almon
Supervisor

Allen Carlson

Morton L. Ross

Date 30 November 1984

To my parents

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate that William Carlos Williams attempts to create and to promote American art, and that his aesthetic theory is based upon his view of American history and ideology. My discussion of the contact theory begins with a consideration of Williams' contention that the United States, like all nations, must have its own cultural identity, and that this identity can be found only through contact with local conditions. American critical standards and American art must, from Williams' point of view, be based upon the artist's ability to express his own experiences and his own locality, and consequently the contact theory becomes an argument against Eliot and the Modernists' subservience to tradition.

In Chapter 2, I show how Williams' interpretation of American history indicates to him that American criticism and American art must express the same revolutionary spirit that brought about America's struggle for political independence. His view of American history also leads him to believe, as I reveal in Chapter 3, that the pragmatic, American view of knowledge is the artist's view and the modern view as well. Individual truths, learned through one's own senses, are the only truths to be known in the modern world, where Einstein's theory of relativity has shown that truth is relative to time and place and that universal truth does not exist, making deference to a higher authority than oneself a characteristic of the past.

Chapter 4 is a discussion of the ways in which the American liberal-democratic ideology becomes, for Williams, the basis of a new

relationship between the individual and the world around him--a relationship in which, through sympathetic understanding and tolerance, the individual denies his own will to have power over things, in order to allow those things to reveal themselves to him. The environment, as I show in Chapter 5, expresses itself through the poet when the poet himself employs the language spoken in his own culture. But the culture is revealed not only in its own language, but also in the very form of the expression; political and social order, in the modern world, is not imposed by authority, but is derived from the situation of the people themselves, and, according to the contact theory, as I demonstrate in Chapter 6, the modern world can be expressed only in forms that are derived from the experience that is being expressed and not in forms imposed upon that experience by traditional values.

Williams himself generally uses the contact theory to advantage in his own works and, as I show in Chapter 7, his work reveals a continuous struggle to find forms that will express his own experience of America and the modern world. But unfortunately the contact theory implies that American ideology is the modern ideology, and that anyone who does not accept this ideology can be neither an intelligent man nor a great artist. What begins as an argument for cultural relativism becomes a chauvinistic glorification of Williams' own concept of America, limiting American artists to this vision of America and modern artists everywhere to this vision of the modern world.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Titles frequently cited in the text are referred to by the abbreviations listed below.

A	*The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1951).
ARI	*A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists*, ed. Bram Dijkstra (New York: New Directions, 1978).
CI	*Contact*, First series, 1921-1924.
CII	*Contact*, Second series, 1932.
CIII	*Contact* (San Francisco), 1958-1965.
CEP	*The Collected Earlier Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1966).
CLP	*The Collected Later Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1967).
DW	*The Descent of Winter* [1928], rpt. in *Imaginations*, ed. Webster Schott (New York: New Directions, 1970).
EK	*The Embodiment of Knowledge*, ed. Ron Loewinsohn (New York: New Directions, 1974).
GAN	*The Great American Novel*, (Paris), 1923; rpt. in *Imaginations*.
IAG	*In the American Grain* (1925; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1956).
Int	*Interviews with William Carlos Williams "Speaking Straight Ahead,"* ed. Linda Wagner (New York: New Directions, 1976).
IWWP	*I Wanted to Write a Poem* ([Boston], 1958; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1978).
KH	*Kora in Hell: Improvisations* (Boston), 1920; rpt. in *Imaginations*.
Nov	*A Novelette and Other Prose* (Toulon), 1932; rpt. in *Imaginations*.
P	*Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963).
PB	*Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems* (New York: New Directions, 1962).
R	*Rome*, in *The Iowa Review*, 9:3 (Summer 1978), 12-65.

SA	*Spring and All* (Dijon), 1923; rpt. in *Imaginations*.
SE	*Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1951).
SL	*Selected Letters*, ed. John C. Thirlwall (New York: McDowell Obelensky, 1957).

INTRODUCTION

"TO WRITE AMERICAN POETRY"

> And with a stick,
> scratching within the littered field--
> old plaster, bits of brick--to find what
> coming? In God's name! Washed out, worn
> out, scavengered and rescavengered--
>
> Spirit of place rise from these ashes
> repeating secretly an obscure refrain:
>
> This is my house and here I live.
> Here I was born and this is my office--
>
> --passionately leans examining, stirring
> with the stick, a child following.
> (*CEP*, 395)

> But by this approach, which I am trying to sketch, WHAT we today, I believe, are trying to do is not only to *disengage* the elements of the measure but ALSO to seek what we believe is there: *a new measure or a new way of measuring* . . . a poem that will be commensurate with the social, economic world in which we are living as contrasted with the past that will return us to our sense of reality in the poem. It is in many ways a different world from the past calling for different "signs," "terms" of different scope, if we are to make that which was recognizable in the terms of the past recognizable to us today. We are nosing along a mysterious coast-line and have not yet broached the continent. An attitude toward it is all I am proposing--I should not care to recommend what Cortez did to Mexico.
>
> I speak of an approach to a possible continent, such poems as would signalize a complete break with the past, fit to lay beside the work of the past which they would thus affirm by their newness.
>
> It is precarious territory.[1]

Hugh Kenner, in *The Pound Era*, calls William Carlos Williams "the best theorist the Paris decade had."[2] Ironically, at the beginning of what Kenner calls "the Paris decade," the decade of the 1920s, Williams was at home, in Rutherford, New Jersey, practising medicine and editing, along with Robert McAlmon, a little magazine called *Contact*; in *Contact* Williams and McAlmon state their concern for American art (a concern made more urgent because of the growing number of American artists who were leaving the United States for Europe, and Paris in particular). As Malcolm Cowley, himself an expatriate during the 1920s, explains, Americans of that period had not been taught to value their own heritage and their own environment, but had learned instead about ancient history, European geography, and English, not American, literature: "Looking backward, I feel that our whole training was involuntarily directed toward destroying whatever roots we had in the soil, toward eradicating our local and regional peculiarities, toward making us homeless citizens of the world."[3] In a theory that is an attempt to explain why contact between the artist and the immediate conditions of his native environment is a necessary part of the artistic process, Williams exalts American values in opposition to the values of Europe and of the past, and he combats teachings that justify expatriatism and glorify European culture.

From even before the time that Williams and McAlmon express their determination to give all their energy to "the setting up of new vigors of artistic perception, invention and expression in the United States" (*CI*, 2, 12), until Williams' old age, when he tells John Thirlwall of his wish ". . . to use the words we speak and to describe the world we see, as far as it can be done,"[4] Williams attempts to assert the cultural independence of America. In his own art he attempts to find, by scratching "within the littered field," the "Spirit of place" (*CEP*, 395), and to celebrate "the local material" (*Int*, 71), and in his theory he expresses his determination to establish "the American critical attitude"

(CI, 3, 15).

The contact theory is, therefore, the utterance of a working artist, not of a philosopher, and as such it is not strictly theoretical, but an elaborate approach to practice as well. But Williams, in attempting to justify his own art and give direction to his creative energy, and in attempting to promote the kind of American art he was creating in response to the art of the expatriates, mistakenly applies to all art, of whatever culture, what he himself considers to be an American standard of measure. Although Louis Simpson says that "Williams' argument against expatriatism is not chauvinistic--it is a matter of aesthetics,"[5] Williams' view of aesthetics is, as Williams himself admits, an American view. Williams says that he does not intend to become "spokesman for any movement, group or theory" (CI, 1, 1), and that he refuses "to be responsible for teaching anyone how to write" (CI, 3, 14), but his attempt to explain why contact with a locality is necessary in art becomes the expression of an aesthetic theory that is based on his view of the American liberal, democratic ideology revealed in American attitudes towards politics, philosophy, and science. Richard W. Noland points out that In the American Grain (1925), particularly, is "animated by the same nationalism that produced Hart Crane's The Bridge (1930) and by the same search for a 'usable past' that turned Van Wyck Brooks to the period of the flowering of New England."[6] Unfortunately, Williams' call for localism in art becomes a call for the expression of national ideals, and ultimately, contrary to Simpson's judgment, a chauvinistic promotion of American ideology as he sees it.

Ostensibly, the basis of the contact theory is that the relationship between the artist and his subject begins with "the sensual accidents of his immediate contacts" (CI, 4, 18), and, as long as those contacts take place in the artist's own environment, the artist's nationality is of no consequence; Williams and McAlmon state that they will "be American" simply because they are "of America," and that they "will adopt no aggressive or inferior attitude toward 'imported thought' or art" (CI, 1, 1). Williams contends that he wants only to raise American art from provincialism to a position of equality with art of other nations, and that this can be achieved only by creating "a wholly new literature" that is distinctly American (EK, 138). He states that "Because a thing is American or related to the immediate condition it is not therefore to be preferred to the finished product of another culture" (SE, 154), but, when referring to poets who he feels are worth reading, he says, "English writers I exclude axiomatically" (SL, 132). And while he argues that contemporary artists need only put "a sense of contact, and of definite personal realization into their work" (CI, 1, 1), and that critics and artist must measure work "in contradistinction to standards of social, moral or scholastic values--hangovers from past generations no better equipped to ascertain value than we are" (CI, 1, 1), Williams also contends that the modern standards are American. He sees himself as "the product of a new country" and "a child of a new era in the world," and for him both the new country and the new era necessitate a break from "the old measurements" (SL, 328). According to Williams, the new measure and the American measure are based upon the expression of contact between the artist and his locality, and the degree of contact is revealed in the subject of the work, in the artist's attitude towards that subject, and in the form that the expression takes.

As Kenneth Burke points out, Williams himself "persisted unstoppably" in writing and promoting the kind of work that suited what

Burke calls the "doctrine of 'contact.'"[7] In the American Grain (1925), Selected Essays (1954), The Embodiment of Knowledge (1974), A Recognizable Image: William Carlos Williams on Art and Artists (1978), the prose sections of the works collected in Imaginations (1970), the journal written in 1923 and 1924 and published as Rome (1978), the letters, the interviews, the uncollected essays, and even some of the poems themselves, express an "approach to the poem," as Williams himself entitles one of his later essays. But, referring to the title of that essay, Williams emphasizes that he expresses "an approach--not the approach," and he states that his perspective is "basic but it is not the only approach to the poem."[8] In fact Williams encourages the development of other theories because he believes that they are necessary to the creation of the work of art itself: "No man can live without a theory, and we are continually being flooded with new theories and new writers" (Int, 32). He is convinced that ". . . without a theory, as Pasteur once said, to unify it, a man's life becomes little more than an aimless series of random and repetitious gestures" (SE, 272).

Williams' own theory, though it is not found only in Contact magazine, is embodied in the term "contact" and all the ramifications Williams gives to the word that became the title of three separate magazines with which he was associated. The first Contact, edited by Williams and McAlmon, established the theory on which the other two were based. The first version of Contact consisted of five issues--four issues appeared between December, 1920, and the summer of 1921, and the fifth appeared in June, 1923, while McAlmon was living in Europe. Contact was revived in 1932 for three more issues, this time with Williams as editor, McAlmon serving as what Reed Whittemore calls "literary scout abroad,"[9] and the addition of Nathanael West to the editorial board. The third incarnation of Contact, with Williams acting as advisory editor in the early stages, was published in San Francisco and ran for twenty-one issues between 1958 and 1965. The first issue of Contact (San Francisco) is dedicated to Williams, reprints his "Comment" from the February, 1932, issue of Contact, and includes a new article by Williams entitled "The Contact Story."

In his autobiography, Williams states that McAlmon, a young man from the midwest whom he had met at a party in New York in 1919, was "the instigator in the Contact idea" (A, 175). In "The Contact Story," Williams again credits McAlmon with the idea of a new magazine, the name of which "was to signalize a new concept of life among the literati, about the denizens of the moderns with whom we were acquainted, in whom lack of contact with life was most typical in our opinion--from the type of things they were seeking to publish" (CIII, I [1958], 75). Several critics, including Dickran Tashjian, argue that the title of Contact magazine "alluded to the 'contact' an airplane makes with the earth upon landing."[10] But McAlmon himself says that "The editors of Contact can shoulder no responsibility for assumptions regarding their meaning not based on what they, with a fair degree of clarity, have said" (CI, 4, 16), and nothing that either Williams or McAlmon did say had anything to do with airplanes.

Nor can it be said that McAlmon played a crucial role in determining or expressing the contact theory; Williams, through his connections with the Imagists, the Others group, and Alfred Stieglitz, had been developing the theory since long before he met McAlmon, and he espoused the theory for the rest of his life, whereas McAlmon left

America, never again to express any aesthetic theory. As Vivienne Koch points out in the first critical book devoted to Williams' work, Williams had been trying, during the decade before 1920, to establish his own attitudes and perspectives on literature and literary theory, and to revaluate existing theories, so "his editing of Contact must have sharpened his focus for such revaluation . . . ."[11] Williams had, in fact, published several comments about literary theory before Contact appeared, and despite Williams' regard for McAlmon the ideas expounded by Williams and McAlmon in Contact are, as even McAlmon's biographer, Sanford Smoller, must admit, "characteristically Williams's."[12]

In 1920 Williams was thirty-seven years old. He had been associated with the Imagist movement and with several little magazines, predominantly Others, before he met McAlmon in 1919. The title of "Vortex," an essay written in 1915, reveals at least the remnants of Ezra Pound's influence on Williams, but the essay itself outlines several ideas that are independent of Pound, and that might be considered early foundations of the contact theory:

> I will express my emotions in the appearances: surfaces, sounds, smells, touch of the place in which I happen to be.
>
> I will not make an effort to leave that place for I deny that I am dependent on any place.
>
> I will not write differently now or at a hundred except as I am different and I will not value one part of my life more than another; therefore I shall not judge myself by a single standard that is not varied by time. (ARI, 58)

Williams' concern with sensory contact with the life of the place in which he lives, including the language of that place, his belief that the inspiration for art can be found in any place, and his concern with standards set by the conditions of time and place, conditions which determine how the writer will write--determine, that is, the shape of the work itself--are evident in "Vortex," and become part of the contact theory.

In the years just prior to 1920 New York had its own avant-garde, and Williams was a part of this group of artists who were trying to promote the development of artistic expression in America. He became a regular visitor to Alfred Stieglitz's gallery, 291, and a reader of Stieglitz's magazine, Camera Work.[13] He became involved also with a group of writers including Marianne Moore, Wallace Stevens, Mina Loy, and Alfred Kreymborg, who became known collectively as "the Others group" because of their association with Others magazine. American little magazines such as Poetry, Poetry Journal, The Little Review, and Others all accepted submissions from Williams, and they became models for his own concept of what a little magazine should be. Of these magazines, Others is perhaps most important to the study of Williams because it is the one with which Williams became most strongly associated.

Others magazine had as its motto a single sentence: "The old expressions are with us always, and there are always others." As the title of the magazine indicates, its editors were concerned with the "others," the new expressions. The first issue of Others appeared in July, 1915, and from that time forth Williams became an increasingly important member of the group that met at Kreymborg's home, and Kreymborg acknowledges that "Among the first contributors to Others, no person gave as much of himself as Bill Williams."[14] But Williams began to feel that Others was not selective enough--that it had no real guiding principles by which to conduct the selection process--and he objected to the "attempt to present a blank page to Tom, Dick and Harry with the invitation to write a masterpiece upon it."[15]

Consequently, in 1919 Williams single-handedly "blasted out of existence" the magazine that he had helped to found. In an article in which he discusses the little magazines of the time, he says that *Others* had "grown inevitably to be a lie, like everything else that has been a truth at one time," and he insists that a new magazine is needed--a magazine that has "a new conception from the bottom up."[16] Although several members of "the *Others* group" became contributors to *Contact*, which appeared only a year after *Others* ceased publication, Williams' comments about *Others* and other little magazines indicate that he felt a new magazine needed a strong theoretical base which he, not McAlmon, gave to *Contact*.

But perhaps the best evidence of Williams' dominant influence in the formulation of the contact theory is the continuation of the magazine itself after McAlmon left America in 1921,[17] and Williams' own promotion of contact, unaided by McAlmon: "*Contact* was to exploit the genius of one of its editors but that genius, unfortunately for the magazine, led him another way. This was not, however, the end of the venture" (*CII*, I, 88). While McAlmon, as Robert E. Knoll points out, "wandered from city to city, from culture to culture" trying to write a "transcontinental novel,"[18] Williams became, in Paul Mariani's opinion, increasingly obsessed with sensual contact with the immediate locality: "Over the next thirty years Williams would return to this subject with increasing insistence, his shrillness becoming more noticeable as his despair over his country's indifference to an indigenous culture became ever more apparent."[19] Mariani even goes so far as to say that ". . . contact had always been everything to him."[20]

Although McAlmon founded the Contact Publishing Company in

Paris and during the 1920s published such writers as Gertrude Stein, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and Williams, he did not continue to expound the theory of contact, and unlike Williams he did not continue to write about art and literature. McAlmon produced some excellent short stories, particularly those in Distinguished Air (Grim Fairy Tales) (1925), which are set in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. He also wrote poetry, including The Portrait of a Generation (1926) and North America, Continent of Conjecture (1929), and perhaps the best account of expatriate life in Europe during the 1920s, Being Geniuses Together (1938).[21] But almost without exception McAlmon's published works were written while he was an expatriate, and by leaving America McAlmon had broken one of contact's essential tenets.

Williams, in a letter to Amy Lowell shortly after McAlmon's departure, laments the distance placed between himself and McAlmon--a distance not only of space but of attitude as well:

> I wish I had the boy back with me and not lost there abroad, to no good purpose I feel sure. My God, have we not had enough Pounds and Eliots? The Sacred Wood is full of them and their air rifles. But perhaps Bob will do better. He will do better only on condition that he comes back to America soon.
>
> I must confess that I am heartbroken. (SL, 51)

The importance of McAlmon's friendship with Williams must not be belittled, but McAlmon's contribution to the contact theory cannot be considered essential. Ultimately, Paul Mariani's assessment of the matter seems sound: "For a while, then, in the fall of 1920 and the winter of '21, Williams had someone he could trust to understand what he was after in terms of an American culture."[22]

In a sense, Williams' struggle for American culture is merely a continuation of the battle that has raged in America for as long as

America itself has been settled by European immigrants--the battle between factions that Philip Rahv calls the "redskins," who want an indigenous American literature, and the "palefaces," who see America as an extension of the tradition of western civilization.[23] Williams himself recognizes that this split has always been a part of American consciousness, but he sees the cultural element that looks toward Europe being "retrograde in its tendency," whereas the other is "forward-looking but under a shadow from the first" (SE, 35). What Williams seeks, then, is a victory for those who pursue an indigenous American art, so that American art might be taken out of the shadow of European tradition.

Williams recognized that the expatriate movement of the 1920s was not a simple matter of a change of scene; Williams saw it as a movement away from American cultural values. Cowley's view of the expatriates, in Exile's Return, perhaps indicates that Williams' fears for the future of an indigenous American art were justified: "At last hundreds and thousands of them became veritable exiles, living in Paris or the South of France and adhering to a theory of art which held that the creative artist is absolutely independent of all localities, nations, or classes."[24] But while Williams disapproves of this lack of concern for "localism," which is almost synonymous, for Williams, with "Americanism," his great fear is that Americans will adopt the values expounded by T. S. Eliot.

Eliot, along with Ezra Pound, advocated traditional values that Williams felt were more European than American. Williams believed that tradition should not be a factor in the creation or judgment of art and, in Contact, Williams and McAlmon say that they "as thoroughly dislike a modern traditionalism as any manner of perceiving the arts" (CI, 1, 1).

As Paul Mariani points out, Williams began to criticize Eliot after the appearance of Prufrock and Other Observations (1917),[25] though Williams' most infamous attack on Eliot, in his autobiography, is in reference to The Waste Land, which was published in 1922 and which Williams considered to be nothing less than traitorous:

> Then out of the blue The Dial brought out The Waste Land and all our hilarity ended. It wiped out our world as if an atom bomb had been dropped upon it and our brave sallies into the unknown were turned to dust.
>
> To me especially it struck like a sardonic bullet. I felt at once that it had set me back twenty years, and I'm sure it did. Critically Eliot returned us to the classroom just at the moment when I felt that we were on the point of an escape to matters much closer to the essence of a new art form itself--rooted in the locality which should give it fruit. I knew at once that in certain ways I was most defeated.
>
> Eliot had turned his back on the possibility of reviving my world. And being an accomplished craftsman, better skilled in some ways than I could ever hope to be, I had to watch him carry my world off with him, the fool, to the enemy. (A, 174)

An understanding of Eliot, then, is crucial to an understanding of Williams' theory because in Eliot Williams sees the incarnation of all that he is fighting against. Williams sees Eliot as his most influential foe, with whom he is battling for control of American letters:

> . . . THE TRADITIONALISTS OF PLAGIARISM try to get hold of the mob. They seize those nearest them and shout into their ears: Tradition! The solidarity of life!
>
> The fight is on: These men who have had the government of the mob through all the repetitious years resent the new order. Who can answer them? (SA, 97-98)

The contact theory is, therefore, in its call for a revolution against the old order based in England, and its establishment of a new order that is not only based locally but has as its fundamental governing principle the attempt to stay in contact with immediate conditions, the expression of Williams' desire to create American art that is independent of Europe in the same way that the United States is an independent nation, and a way to find order that is indicative of the American attitude towards the nature of political power and the right to govern. But the theory is also, in its struggle for a new order, an argument against the Modernist critical establishment; in its emphasis on the artist's expression of his personal experiences of his own locality, its opposition to monism, its call for sympathy and tolerance towards all things, and its concern for openness and multiplicity of forms, the contact theory sets itself in opposition to the Modernism of Eliot. And while Modernism is, as Iris Murdoch says, subject to "'dryness' (smallness, clearness, self-containedness),"[26] Williams, in combatting this "dryness," is guilty of overstatement and of the "messy"[27] emotionalism and revolutionary zeal that turn a concern for locality and nationality into chauvinism.

However, although Eliot is the enemy,[28] the roots of the revolution, and the basis of the "new order," according to Williams, are to be found in American history and American literary history. In In the American Grain, Williams gives Edgar Allan Poe credit for being "a genius intimately shaped by his locality and time" (IAG, 216) and for being in opposition to those who "concerned poetry with literature" instead of with life (IAG, 221). Williams praises Poe's "Longfellow and Other Plagiarists" as a major document in the struggle "to have 'culture' for America by 'finding' it, full blown--somewhere" (IAG, 224), but unfortunately he omits Whitman from In the American Grain, his study of the American historical figures who he feels were crucial to the development of an American ideology; yet Williams does see Whitman as the quintessential American poet, and in fact he states that "Whitman created the art in America":[29]

> I think there is only one major lead--I think our one major lead, as Americans, is to educe and exploit the significance of Walt Whitman's formal excursions: And nothing else!
>
> In America we had and still have an unformed, more or less anonymous language which, among our writers, Whitman was the first to perceive and to act upon with firmness and decision--to break down the old forms. This was the first step in our regeneration, in our formal regeneration. To a large extent, unfortunately, it has been to date, our last.[30]

Williams' intention, then, is to take up the battle for an indigenous American poetry where Whitman had left it, and where no other American poet since Whitman had ventured.

As Mariani points out, Williams believes that Whitman's contribution to American poetry is "in the bold breaking with the English tradition,"[31] and Williams himself says that the major American "heritage" from Whitman is in "the break he instituted with traditional forms of the poem."[32] The breakdown of old forms must, according to Williams, have greater goals in sight, and the primary goal must be to find a new way to find form: "In the poem a rebellion against older forms means nothing unless, finally, we have a new form to substitute for that which has become empty from the exhaustion of its means" (SE, 272). Therefore Williams believes that Whitman "barely scratched the surface"[33] in the development of American poetry because he did not develop a way to govern the form of the poem itself, and "there never has been any positive value in the form or lack of form known as free verse . . ." (SE, 272):

> No verse can be free, it must be governed by some measure, but not by the old measure. There Whitman was right but there, at the same time, his leadership failed him. The time was not ready for it. We have to return to some measure but a measure consonant with our time and not a mode so rotten that it stinks. (SE, 339)

In his attempts to discover a way to govern the making of a poem, Williams uses a political analogy in which free verse is seen as "verse whose proper structure escapes a man's efforts to control it":[34]

> The thing is that "free verse" since Whitman's time has led us astray. He was taken up, as were the leaders of the French Revolution before him with the abstract idea of freedom. It slopped over into all our thinking. But it was an idea lethal to all order, particularly to that order which has to do with the poem. Whitman was right in breaking our bounds but, having no valid restraints to hold him, went wild. He didn't know any better. At the last he resorted to a loose sort of language with no discipline about it of any sort and we have copied its worst feature, just that.
>
> The corrective to that is forgetting Whitman, for instinctively he was on the right track, to find a new discipline. Invention is the mother of art. We must invent new modes to take the place of those which are worn out. (SE, 339)

Williams' determination "to infuse Americans with the strength and purity of their own traditions which are lying all about us unused,"[35] which he expressed as early as 1910, becomes a determination to find a way to govern the making of a poem; a way that he sees will be in opposition to the old order. But if Whitman exemplifies the American tradition, that tradition itself is the breakdown of traditional forms, so Williams maintains that "the only way to be like Whitman is to write unlike Whitman." He emphasizes the distinction between maintaining the democratic spirit of Whitman and writing like Whitman: "Be a Whitman, if you will, only please, if you love your kind, don't write like Whitman."[36] Williams himself, looking back at the period after 1913, states:

> As I have said before, this was a period of finding a poetry of my own. I wanted order, which I appreciated. The orderliness of verse appealed to me—as it must to any man—but even more I wanted a new order. I was positively repelled by the old order which, to me, amounted to restriction. (IWWP, 18)

He acknowledges the need for "Some measure yes, but a new one" (EK, 145), and he sees this as the condition of the modern world itself: "the search of the modern world for a new measure, a new way of measuring."[37]

In Contact Williams expresses his understanding that there must be a "motive power behind all composition" (CI, 5, 2), a rationale behind the very existence of the work and the form that work takes. Williams' own rationale is based on his view of the "philosophical and psychic underpinnings" (SL, 227) of America itself. Williams, as the title of an early essay indicates, wishes "To Write American Poetry," which, as he explains late in his life, is to celebrate America in language and forms that express America itself:

> I always wanted to write a poem celebrating the local material. . . . I wanted to celebrate the material in a dignified way—not dignified for heaven knows it was not dignified—but to use only the material that concerned the locale that I occupied, that I do occupy still, to have no connection with the European world, but to be purely American, to celebrate it as an American. (Int, 71)

It is on this issue, the attempt to find an American way to govern the making of a poem, that Williams' theorizing ceases to be merely a continuation of the battle between the palefaces and the redskins, but critics have failed to recognize how Williams' conception of "Americanism" governs not only his own art but his aesthetic theory as well.

In 1922, writing under the pseudonym of W. C. Blum, James Sibley Watson compares Williams' attempts to "ripen a new literature" in the United States with Pound's "remedy," which is "to parse all the classics, ancient and modern," and Van Wyck Brooks' desire "to improve our morals and let art come as an inconsiderable afterthought." But Watson does not recognize how ". . . a given piece of writing shows contact with the writer's environment."[38] Later critics, however, have seen that the contact between an artist and his particular cultural environment is expressed in both the form and the content of the work of art itself. Rod Townley believes, justifiably, that the sentence concluding the first issue of Contact ("We believe that in the perfection of that contact is the beginning not only of the concept of art among us but the key to the technique also") is "a profound and germinal key to a new poetry."[39] As early as 1957, in an unpublished Ph.D. dissertation entitled William Carlos Williams' Image of America, Joseph Evans Slate indicates that ". . . Williams' esthetic theory is always related to his view of America . . . ," and that this view "explains much of his art, in form as well as content";[40] however, Williams' reasons for advocating contact with a particular cultural environment, and the way that he believes contact with America can produce "a wholly new literature" have not been evaluated by Slate or by any other critic, even though the importance of such an evaluation was stressed by Williams himself, who told one critic, ". . . only by an understanding of my 'theory of the poem' will you be able to reconcile my patent failures with whatever I have done that seems worthwhile" (SL, 286).

Williams' motives, his goals, and his rationale have never been thoroughly examined. Unfortunately, the catchwords "antipoetic," "free verse," "regionalist," and "primitive," which Alan Ostrom refers to disparagingly in The Poetic World of William Carlos Williams, continue to plague Williams.[41] Even Kenneth Burke, Williams' friend, calls him "our most distinguished neanderthal man." But Burke himself explains that he means only that Williams desires to "go back to the source,"[42] to the environment and the things of the environment. Williams is, from this perspective, part of the long Adamic tradition of American literature as it has been mapped out by critics such as Roy Harvey Pearce and

R. W. B. Lewis.[43]

This attempt to "go back to the source" does not, despite Williams' own statements against philosophy, indicate that Williams lacks a vision that is informed by a system of values. Joseph N. Riddel regards Williams' method of expression, his "bursts of rhetorical contradiction which postured as philosophical discourse but which revealed a naïveté and lack of rigor that repels systematic thinkers," as evidence that Williams' poetry is not "in-formed by an assumed or received system or vision."[44] Aside from a short "Manifesto" published in Pagany in 1930,[45] in which, as Paul Mariani says, Williams "stressed once again the very thing he'd emphasized in editing Contact ten years before,"[46] he does not systematically draw up a programme for American art--but he does have a decipherable theory nevertheless. Williams must, of course, be held responsible for his "messy" prose style--for what are often ambiguous and obtuse statements in his writing, for sentences that do not complete a thought and that end without punctuation. As Charles Doyle points out, Williams has an "instinct to 'write carelessly'" in his poems,[47] but this desire to capture the immediacy of the moment is a part of Williams' theoretical approach, and it is part of the technique used in writing the theory itself.

Because the theory itself is expressed in an unsystematic and fragmentary manner, several critics have touched upon aspects of the contact theory without analyzing all of it. J. Hillis Miller's chapter on Williams in Poets of Reality: Six Twentieth-Century Writers, though it focuses primarily on the consequences of Williams' "sensual contact" with his environment, remains a seminal work. Miller views the theory in the light of other twentieth-century literature, and he sees Williams' work existing in a "new space," "a space in which things, the mind, and words coincide in closest intimacy." This intimacy is made possible, according to Miller, because of a "return to earth," and because of the abandonment of the sense of distance between things.[48] Miller recognizes that Williams' "resignation to existence" makes possible also "the disappearance of a distinction between subject and object," creating "a new understanding of reality."[49] But while Miller points out one of the effects of the contact theory, he does not consider the rationale behind the theory itself.

Allan Ostrom, in The Poetic World of William Carlos Williams, does attempt to study Williams' theory "by assembling and inspecting his statements of esthetic,"[50] but his study, like Miller's, relies on Williams' books available in the early 1960s, which do not include many of the important statements made in little magazines and in The Embodiment of Knowledge (1974). Ostrom begins with the premise that, "Underlying and informing all of Williams' work is his complex of ideas about the nature of art and art's relation to the well-being of both the individual and society," but he incorrectly interprets this "complex of ideas" as a tenet "identical to the ideas of Pound, Eliot, and Stevens."[51] He thus fails to express how American ideology, as Williams sees it, governs Williams' aesthetics and distinguishes his approach from the approaches taken by other writers.

The one piece of criticism that focuses on the theory of contact, a chapter in Dickran Tashjian's Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-garde 1910-1925, reveals a narrow, if not entirely incorrect, view of Williams' theory, and perhaps a false view of Dadaism as well. Tashjian sets out to reveal the influence of Dadaism on

American art. He states that Williams took a radical, "anti-art" stance, like the Dadaists:

> Williams' anti-art sentiments articulated in Contact implied the course he would take in his poetry, treading an anti-art line between the temptations of European tradition and innovation, on the one hand, and the artistic obtuseness of American, on the other. In order to liberate his own poetic impulses, he found he had to take a radical stance.[52]

Tashjian argues that the only reason Williams did not call himself a Dadaist is that Dadaism was a French movement and Williams was dedicated to "contact with the local environment in terms of particular experience":[53]

> Although his values obviously approximated those of Dada, they were embodied in a theory of contact which, by its very nature, had to reject Dada as a foreign movement. Otherwise, American artists would produce a second-hand Dada in an incongruous cultural milieu.[54]

Tashjian is correct in his belief that Williams did not want to create second-hand Dada, and Williams did agree with Duchamp that anything could become art, if the artist could reveal the object in a new light--perhaps simply by dissociating that thing from its utilitarian value. Tashjian is correct also in his view of Williams' concern with the local conditions. But Williams' theory cannot be related to the nihilistic spirit of Dada. Williams did rebel against the tyranny of models from the past, particularly European models, but he broke from the past only to be able to build in the present, and his constant concern is, "Have we broken down enough? Are we ready to build?"[55]

The critical confusion regarding Williams' theory is evident, then, in the wide diversity of what is largely unsubstantiated opinion about it. In fact, Webster Schott, in his introduction to Imaginations (1970), denies that Williams even has a theory: "It was an art so embedded in his own personality and manner of living even Williams could never translate it into a coherent system of aesthetics readily available to others."[56] Hyatt Waggoner dismisses Williams' theorizing by saying that ". . . Williams' constant pronouncements on poetry and poetics are almost never of such quality as would force us to take them seriously . . . ,"[57] and Yvor Winters caustically dismisses Williams himself by calling him "a foolish and ignorant man, but at moments a fine stylist."[58] These harsh opinions are, however, in direct contrast to Kenner's impression of Williams as a theorist, and to Steven Ross Loevy's judgment: "Clearly, the program for American poetry Charles Olson declared nearly 30 years later in 'Projective Verse,' drew upon many of the central Contact ideas" (R, 3). But none of these opinions can be either accepted or denied without an understanding and an evaluation of the theory itself, and the premises on which it is based.

Although Williams has very definite views about aesthetics, his opinions, expressed in random fragments over a sixty-year period, are in numerous little magazines and collections. To say that it is necessary to "translate" Williams' comments into "a coherent system of aesthetics" is in itself to indicate that there are serious problems for anyone, artist or critic, wishing to apply the theory; yet the contact theory does require exposition. From the fragments, patterns of thought emerge, and it becomes evident that Williams tries to rationalize his own views on art, even though he says his is only "an approach," by claiming that his is the perspective of all artists, of Americans, and of the modern world. His desire "To Write American Poetry" is given expression in a theory that, while purporting to justify the presentation of the artist's contact with his own locality, reveals an insidious American chauvinism that hurts its own cause.

The first principle of the contact theory rests on Williams' view of the relationship of art, culture, and locality. Williams argues that cultural relativism (the uniqueness and equality of all cultures), and the commonality of the human spirit, become evident when artists reveal their actual experiences, which take place in their native environments. He contends that great art is based on life in the environment of its creator, and he wishes to produce and to judge art on this basis, not on traditional standards and classical models. Both culture and art are, from this perspective, determined primarily by place.

But contrary to his own view of the importance of place in determining culture, Williams recognizes that culture involves ideology--that body of doctrine, myth, and ideas about human life and culture which constitutes a sociopolitical program. America, then, is not only a place; it is a concept as well. Williams' own opinion about American ideology, as he admits, is not unbiased; he is blatantly chauvinistic in his optimism about American ideology, if not about America itself. He explains how, in American ideology, the value placed upon democracy, equality, and liberty, promotes tolerance and denies prejudice; paradoxically, however, at the same time he contends that these values are part of the best and the most humane ideology in the world. And despite his own argument that Americans rely upon their own experience of a place rather than upon a concept of what that place is, Williams is unswerving in his opinion that his concept of America is the correct one, and that American ideology is the only truly modern ideology. America, in Williams' conception of it, is not only the New World, a place distinct from the old world in Europe, it is also, because of its ideological emphasis on experience and on immediacy, a world forever new.

Aside from keeping Americans in touch with the changing world, American ideology, Williams says, gives Americans other advantages: in its emphasis on a pragmatic approach to the world, the denial of intellectual conceptualization in favor of knowledge gained through experience, American ideology is not only the modern ideology, substantiated by Einstein's theory of relativity which Williams says eliminates the possibility of any static philosophy,[59] it is also the approach taken by all artists. Again Williams, against his own advice, bases his argument on concepts--concepts of how an artist approaches the world, of what America is, and of what the modern world is--but in his argument itself, knowledge is seen as a function of the senses, and intelligence becomes virtually indistinguishable from imagination. Ignoring his own call for liberty and tolerance, he makes contact with the local environment a prerequisite of American art, and of all modern art, regardless of the culture it expresses.

But in what is, when applied to other artists and their art, a limited and narrow approach, Williams finds for himself a unique and valuable attitude towards the relationship between the artist and the subject of his work--a new relationship through which the artist presents not a reflection of that subject but, by being in sympathetic contact with it, its own self-image. Through "sensual contact," a descent into the world to become a part of it, denying the will to have power over it, Williams attempts to allow the world to reveal itself to him; the artist and the subject act together to produce the work of art.

In literary arts, this self-image is expressed through language, which Williams contends has the power to create a world based upon the actual world, if there is the "essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them" (CI, 1, 10). He argues that because America has had a language imposed upon it, the English language, American writers must attempt to "cleanse" words by emphasizing the relationship between words and things and by stressing the dissimilarities, rather than the similarities, of things themselves.

Form, too, in the contact theory, becomes the unique expression of its subject--the embodiment of the experience it contains, in the language of the locality and the form suited to the situation depicted. Unfortunately, Williams determines that organic form, which is determined by that which it expresses, is not only the American way to govern form (form that is neither entirely free nor subjugated by restrictive conventional forms), but the modern way as well. Again ignoring both his own arguments for cultural relativism and his own call for liberty, he imposes his view of American forms on all American artists, and his view of modern forms on artists everywhere. Although "the impact of experience" can suggest form, and although Williams uses unconventional forms from the period of the first Contact magazine until the end of his life, organic form is not, as Williams says it is, the form necessitated by the modern world.

Ultimately, because Williams equates America with the modern world, American ideology becomes for him the only ideology that can express modern sensibility. He gives no indication that he recognizes the limitations of the American democratic ideology, or that in advocating the local in art or politics he is being anything except liberal and just. He fails to see that his attitudes are valid only from within the American ideological position itself. Williams has succeeded in creating an aesthetic theory which is suited to American ideology as he sees it and which serves his own purposes as an artist, but his very success in creating an American aesthetic is the limitation of the theory itself.

CHAPTER 1

"THE IMPORTANCE OF PLACE": ART, CULTURE, AND LOCALITY

> Before any of the arguments begin they must be placed, for from place, a place, begins everything--is in fact a place. Synchronously occupied by everything and at the same time space itself--nothing but. Before science, philosophy, religion, ethics--before they can begin to function--is a region unsusceptible to argument. (EK, 130)

Dickran Tashjian claims that Williams is "antagonistic, in short, towards culture,"[1] but Williams' hostility is actually directed against the belief that culture itself or the conventions of art can be transported from one place to another or from one age to another. Whereas Eliot differentiates between the term "culture" as it is used to express "the way of life of a particular people living together in one place,"[2] and as it is used to speak of "European culture,"[3] which he says is based on religion and a common heritage, "the literature of Rome, of Greece and of Israel,"[4] Williams simplistically focuses only on the living culture of a particular place, and undervalues the role that interchange amongst various cultures plays in determining the culture of any place. Consequently, while Eliot bases his views on art on the "suggestion" that every art in the European tradition contains "the same three elements: the local tradition, the common European tradition, and the influence of the art of one European country upon another,"[5] Williams attempts to create art that is the expression of his locality, and to judge art on the basis of its expression of the artist's experience of his local culture. Therefore, while Williams' approach limits the artist himself to the presentation of actual experience, it offers a perspective through which criticism is based on art's relationship to the time and place in which it is created, not to a standard set of classics.

The titles of several of the works written by Williams (The Great American Novel, In the American Grain, Life along the Passaic River, The First President, Paterson) attest to his concern with American settings; yet his statements regarding theory indicate that in no way does he see himself as a mere provincial or regionalist. Williams' concern with America, and particularly the area around Rutherford, New Jersey, where he spent most of his life, is the result of his view that art and culture are mutually dependent on the locality from which they are derived, and that in art "local color" is a consequence of the artist's experience, which is necessarily of a place. In Williams' view, only by being "attached with integrity to actual experience" (SE, 118) can art reveal that place to its inhabitants and to other cultures, and only when art is related to life in a particular society at a particular time, and not to other art, does it express the culture itself.[6]

Williams describes imported culture as "borrowed lack of attachment," opposed to the more desirable "culture of immediate references" or "culture of immediacy," and he sees the imposition of "an unrelated culture upon a realistic genius of place" as reason for revolution wherever such a situation exists in the world (SE, 145-48). With good reason, Williams fears colonialism and imperialism in both art and politics, and he is aware that when ideas about what a culture should be are formulated in one place and time and are transported to another cultural environment, the possibilities offered by the new environment can be stifled. But because he does not want any one culture to dominate another culture he puts too much stress on the environment's ability to determine culture.

Williams professes, despite his own concern for American culture, that no one idea of what culture is, or no one culture, should dominate--that there is a "pluralism of effort" in which various cultures can learn from one another while each retains its individuality: "By success in many places on different planes our efforts are confirmed, not driven to defeat and pessimism as in the case of mere central supremacy--which is in effect a denial of reality, not its consummation" (EK, 150). A culture must begin by understanding itself before it can accept what other cultures offer, according to Williams, because ". . . he who does not know his own world, in whatever confused form it may be, must either stupidly fail to learn from foreign work or stupidly swallow it without knowing how to judge of its essential value" (CI, 2, 12); an indigenous culture "cannot be bought by smearing a lick of borrowed culture over so many pages" (CI, 2, 10).

Art, for Williams, is an expression of culture, and he believes that the best and perhaps the only true culture is indigenous to the time and place in which it exists--it is the life that is lived by a society in a particular place:[7]

> The burning need of a culture is not a choice to be made or not made, voluntarily, any more than it can be satisfied by loans. It has to be where it arises, or everything related to the life there ceases. It isn't a thing: it's an act. If it stands still, it is dead. It is the realization of the qualities of a place in relation to the life which occupies it; embracing everything involved, climate, geographic position, relative size, history, other cultures--as well as the character of its sands, flowers, minerals and the condition of knowledge within its borders. It is the act of lifting these things into an

> ordered and utilized whole which is culture. It isn't something left over afterward. That is the record only. The act is the thing. It can't be escaped or avoided if life is to go on. It is in the fullest sense that which is fit. (SE, 157)

Williams says that he gives his life willingly "to experience and to prove that Keyserling was right in saying, localism alone can lead to culture,"[8] because he believes that while a culture derived from a particular locality will thrive, ". . . an unrelated culture is neither hardy nor prolific" (SE, 148).

Unlike Exra Pound or T. S. Eliot who, in Guide to Kulchur[9] and Notes toward the Definition of Culture,[10] try to determine and to promote qualities that they believe are necessary to culture and to the cultured individual, Williams approaches the subject of culture from the perspective of the culture itself; demonstrating a belief in cultural relativism,[11] he is more concerned with what the culture *is* than with what it should be. Contact therefore aims "to emphasize the local phase of the game of writing" (CI, 2, 12), and Williams believes that the artist must not try to escape from his own cultural background; he must simultaneously identify and be identified with his culture:

> It is the poet who lives locally, and whose senses are applied no way else than locally to particulars, who is the agent and the maker of all culture. It is the poet's job and the poet lives on the job, on the location. (SL, 225)

Referring specifically to Walker Evans' photographs but in general to all art, Williams states, "In a work of art (and I should say that these pictures are works of art) place is everything" (ARI, 136), but he mistakenly believes that the artist can only gain insight into his own culture when he is in that culture. Williams denies the possibility that distance from the locality, not only contact with it, could provide the perspective from which the artist might best reveal his own culture. In fact, when Williams praises writers such as Gertrude Stein and James Joyce, who were both expatriates, he contradicts his own dictum.

However, this contradiction perhaps only emphasizes that the most important aspect of this part of the theory is not the contact between the artist and his culture but rather the contact between the work itself and the cultural background of the artist. According to Williams, art, as cultural expression, is related to place in the same way that culture is _of_ a particular place; culture is determined by conditions of time and place, and because, for Williams, art is "a record, something to stand against" (_ARI_, 239), it must be the expression of those conditions in order to be useful, and Williams insists that ". . . the purpose of art _IS_ to be useful" (_SE_, 179).

But because of the direct relationship he sees between culture and place, and despite his own protests that he takes the most liberal view of culture, Williams wrongly tries to limit art to actuality. He believes that, in aid of his own culture, the artist must stay in contact with the actual world and reveal that world, to make us "see, materialized, what the 'reality' of our lives hides" (_ARI_, 204):[12]

> The reader knows himself as he was twenty years ago and he has also in mind a vision of what he would be, some day. Oh, some day! But the thing he never dares to know is what he is at the exact moment that he is. And this moment is the only thing in which I am at all interested. (_SA_, 89)

Williams makes a distinction between what is and what is known, and he believes that what a person knows often interferes with his perceptions:

> It is the measurable disproportion between what a man sees and knows that gives the artist his opportunity. He is the watcher and surveyor of that world where the past is always occurring

> contemporaneously and the present always dead needing a miracle of resuscitation to revive it. (SE, 232)

The artist, as seer in the literal sense, sees and reveals the culture which exists but which might not be recognized until it is expressed in art. Only the artist who is in contact with his environment can reveal that environment to those who do not have his vision:

> We go about blind and deaf. . . . The artist must save us. He's the only one who can. First we have to see. Or first we have to be taught to see. We have to be taught to see here, because here is everywhere, related to everywhere else, and if we don't see, hear, taste, smell and feel in this place--not only will we never know anything but the world of sense will be by that much diminished everywhere. (ARI, 137)

Williams feels that artists such as Walker Evans, who photographed scenes of daily life, and American primitive painters, who despite their lack of technical skills captured America in their paintings, are important because people need to see their own culture "re-enacted before them to make it real" (SE, 335). According to Williams, people must see themselves from a perspective that only the artist can give them: "It is ourselves we see, ourselves lifted from a parochial setting. We see what we have not theretofore realized, ourselves made worthy in our anonymity" (ARI, 138).

Williams argues, with some success, that attention to local conditions not only reveals the uniqueness of a particular culture, it also reveals those conditions that are common to all cultures. Williams had learned from John Dewey that "The local is the universal" (SE, 233). But he contrives to make the point, while appearing to be open-minded, that the only way to attain universal proportions, to discern what is common to the human condition in any time or place, is to focus on the particular. He states, with rhetoric that masks somewhat the underlying dogmatism, that, in art, the

> . . . "idea" is not to limit, not to constrict, but not to fly off into "universals," into vapors, either. That is what it is to be an artist with his material before him. It is to be a kind of laborer--a workman--a maker in a very plain sense--nothing vague or transcendental about it: that is the artist--at base. (EK, 23)

Williams believes that whatever affects the artist is worthy of art: "Whatever he sees, whatever is brilliant to him, closest, most significant, no matter what anyone else says about it, that is what he's got to work with till he disproves it or makes it into a satisfactory whole."[13] Like the photographer, who Bram Dijkstra says is "entirely dependent on what exists to the eye; he must see, before he can create,"[14] the poet must depend on the actual world, though unlike the photographer, the poet depends upon contact with all of his senses, not only vision.[15]

Contact with the local culture has, in Williams' opinion, always been essential to great art. In his last work published during his lifetime, Pictures from Brueghel and Other Poems (1962), Williams pays tribute to the sixteenth-century Flemish painter, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, in a series of poems based on Brueghel's paintings. The poems, although they are not presentations of American life, are in praise of Brueghel's contact with his culture. Williams says,

> Brueghel saw it all
> and with his grim
>
> humor faithfully
> recorded
> it (PB, 14)

Williams, in his urgent desire to promote indigenous American art, mistakenly gives the impression that only through contact with his own environment can the contemporary artist create works comparable to the classics: "The classic is the local fully realized, words marked by a place" (SE, 132).

Williams himself recognizes that a major consequence of contact between art and locality is that the work will necessarily express the "local color," which is essentially the local culture; yet "local color" is merely a consequence that results when an artist who is part of a particular cultural environment reveals his experience of that culture:

> We have said simply and as frequently as possible and with as many apt illustrations as we could muster that contact with experience is essential to good writing or, let us say, literature. We have said this in the conviction that contact always implies a local definition of effort with a consequent taking on of certain colors from the locality by the experience, and that these colors or sensual values of whatever sort, are the only realities in writing or, as may be said, the essential quality in literature. (CI, 3, 14)

But the important aspect of this concern with "local color" is that it leaves Williams open to the charge of being a regionalist, a charge to which Williams himself responds:

> But always, at this point, some blank idiot cries out, "Regionalism"! Good God, is there no intelligence left on earth[?] Shall we never differentiate the regional in letters from the objective immediacy of our hand to mouth, eye to brain existence? (CII, 1:2, 109)

Although Williams' defensive stance is not an answer to his detractors, and again his view of culture places undue restrictions upon art, Williams believes, with some justification, that by emphasizing the artist's personal contact with the region rather than the region itself, he can avoid the notion that some places are more conducive than others to the creation of art. For Williams, art is necessarily regional in the sense that the artist is of a particular place, and the culture cannot be revealed by the artist's expression of another place, but the region itself is not as important as the artist's expression of his experiences, which are necessarily of a particular time and place. The locality, wherever it may be, is of concern only in that it, and its history and society, affects the artist because it is part of his experience. It is evident in a work of art only because the artist's experience is of a particular environment.

This view of the relationship between the artist and his environment does, ostensibly, encourage the creation of art from any culture. If the artist in contact with his cultural background expresses his personal perceptions, it is of little consequence what that cultural background is:

> No artist cares a damn where a man comes from or how he comes by the knowledge or perceptive values he uses in his work. But to me there is an overwhelming satisfaction in feeling that a man can be a poet under any circumstances and that this has not removed him from his world but has fastened him upon it with such a deadly grip that he has transformed it in spite of himself.
>
> It is for the poet to announce that no condition can change him, that be he American, Russian, Chinese, Jew he is a poet first, last and always. But one way of announcing this is to take anything, take the land at your feet and use it. It is as good material as another. It is no better but it is as good. In fact the material is nothing. But to prove it is nothing one must not depend on special circumstance, one must use it.[16]

Williams' attachment to America is therefore an attempt to show that while place is important, the particular place is inconsequential except insofar as it is the artist's cultural background. According to Williams, only by establishing that art can be produced anywhere can place be made "insignificant."[17]

In principle at least, Williams' form of regionalism has nothing to do with chauvinism or patriotic fervor, and in a letter to Ezra Pound, Williams also denies that attachment to any particular land necessarily makes writing sentimental or provincial:

> I'm no more sentimental about "murika" than Li Po was about China or Shakespeare about Yingland or any damned Frog about Paris. I know as well as you do that there's nothing sacred about any land. But I also know (as you do also) that there's no taboo effective against any land, and where I live is no more a "province" than I make it. To hell with youse. I ain't tryin' to be an international figure. All I care about is to write. (SL, 139-40)

Williams believes that to deny that art can be created anywhere is to deny the universality of art itself. In his opinion art concerns daily life, not "special circumstance," and therefore "A poem can be made of anything" (KH, 70). He reacts vehemently against the belief held by American expatriates that America itself is not conducive to the creation of art:

> (One of my pet aversions is the belief that you have to go to special places to find excellence in the arts on the principle that you don't find whales in a mill pond. You don't. Neither do you find brains by drinking cheap wine in a bistro, or knowledge merely by eating tripe from a dish stamped with the coat of arms of Christ College.)
>
> Of only one thing relative to a work of art, can we be sure: it was bred of a place. It comes from an application of the senses to that place, a music, and that place can be the middle of the African jungle, the Mexican plateau, a Parisian whorehouse, a room where Oxford chippies sip tea together or a downhill street in a Pennsylvania small town. (ARI, 137-38)

From this perspective, Williams seems to be taking an anti-elitist stance in defence of art from places that are not considered to be cultural centers, and therefore to be enlarging the scope of artistic possibility; but this viewpoint does not take into consideration that by insisting that art must be the expression of actual experience and local conditions the contact theory places severe limitations upon the artist.

Ironically, Williams uses Paris, the city to which many American expatriates had gone, as his example of a place where art flourishes because its artists express French values. His opinion, which is contradicted by the success of artists from other nations who congregated in Paris, is that French art has become universally acclaimed because artists recognize that ". . . Paris is a French city, dominated by French ideas" (EK, 23). Williams, theoretically at least, denies the value of works done by expatriates in Paris, but such a denial, instead of being a valid criticism of the works themselves, is indicative of the contact theory's inability to encompass the scope of art itself.

But despite the limitations he places upon art by insisting that it deal with actuality and with the artist's own locality, Williams is motivated by the praiseworthy attitude that, through art, people from different lands, "associated with another complete paraphernalia," can learn that there is a shared or common human spirit. Williams has the hope that by revealing "what is actual and at the same time universal," even though the actual must be associated with "some place," art can reveal that "All places are alike to the spirit, all races become one and all continents the abode of a universal spirit." The justification for Williams' desire for contact between art and culture is his belief that once people understand that there are basic human concerns no matter where a person lives, "love itself is generated."[18]

Williams hopes, therefore, to establish a situation in which works of art from various cultures complement one another. Such a situation can arise, however, only when each culture has its own art. By the presentation of specific experiences of his own environment, the artist can reveal simultaneously the uniqueness of the setting, the uniqueness of the individual experience, and the common human spirit:

> Being an artist I can produce, if I am able, universals of general applicability. If I succeed in keeping myself objective enough, sensual enough, I can produce the factors, the concretions of materials by which others shall understand and so be led to use--that they may the better see, touch, taste, enjoy--their own world *differing as it may* from mine. By mine, they, different, can be discovered to be the same as I, and, thrown into contrast, will see the implications of a general enjoyment through me.
>
> That--all my life I have striven to emphasize it--is what is meant by the universality of the local. From me where I stand to them where they stand in their here and now--where I cannot be--I do in spite of that arrive! through their work which complements my own, each sensually local. (*SE*, 197-98)

Works of art complement one another when each deals with a particular place at a particular time, thereby distinguishing that scene from any other scene. Other places and times become more apparent because they are distinguishable from the scene depicted in the work of art. Once a place has its own identity, once it has been named and revealed in art, it is separate from all other entities, and it also helps to distinguish those other entities. The artist helps to clarify all places by clarifying any one particular place: "Real they have to be because, unless you paint pure nothing, you paint a place--and in that place you will reveal all places in the world" (*ARI*, 150).

Williams believes that "The Fatal Blunder" made by Eliot and other expatriates is their failure to recognize the importance of place and the universality of the particular:

> Obviously when Mr. T. S. Eliot in *Ash Wednesday* says--I'm sure he says it somewhere, he must have said it since it constitutes his obvious fault--Here it is, *The place is always and only place/ And what is actual is actual ..only for one place*.--When he says a thing like that we know he must be either mad or asleep.[19]

Without this stress on the actual, and on place, Eliot does, as Williams says he does, emphasize more timeless spiritual values and, perhaps more important, he judges works of art by relating them to great works of the past, not to the artist's own culture. But Williams sees the lack of contact with place as mere escapism. According to Williams, the tendency of human nature is to seek refuge in the past, in strange lands, or in mere fantasy, but the artist must focus on his own world, which is, Williams believes, the only world he can know.

The greatest threat to art of the present, in Williams' view, is the past. He sees the move by Americans toward Europe as a move toward literary standards and values established in places and times that are not relevant to America, and he also believes that those literary standards set in different cultures are a hindrance to the expression of immediate conditions that are, to Williams, the "reality" of the living culture. The critic who views a work of art primarily in relation to other works of art and not in relation to the particular experience being expressed, and the artist who is dependent upon allusion and artistic convention both sacrifice the reality of the situation at hand to the past:

> The future is mere fantasy, it does not exist. What we call the future is always the present, unrecognized. But the past! That is where the danger lies. The past doesn't exist any more than does the future. It too is a fantasy, a dream, but a dream that has terrific power over us; and it is always for us a defeat of reality when we permit it to have the government of our lives today. I say this, that it is the past that is the power we have most to fear.
>
> But the past is tradition. Oh, the past is the Academic! It is the denial that the arts arise direct from the people, from the Common Front. It is the assertion that the arts are propagated like the tapeworm from its own segments, that literature begets literature from age to age and people to people. (ARI, 186-87)

And again it is Eliot who epitomizes, as both an artist and a critic, those traditional values that Williams opposes.

Williams, by 1918, even before editing Contact, realizes that

Eliot and Pound are leading American literature in a direction he cannot take. He views their approach to literature, understandably, given his judgments regarding the nature of culture, as "plagiarism of tradition" masquerading as modern American literature. But Williams is as critical of those who accept Pound's and Eliot's works as American literature as he is of Pound and Eliot themselves:

> But our prize poems are especially to be damned not because of superficial bad workmanship, but because they are rehash, repetition--just as Eliot's more exquisite work is rehash, repetition in another way of Verlaine, Baudelaire, Maeterlinck --conscious or unconscious--just as were Pound's early paraphrases from Yeats and his constant later cribbing from the Renaissance, Provence and the modern French: men content with the connotations of their masters.
>
> It is convenient to have fixed standards of comparison: All antiquity! And there is always some everlasting Polonius of Kensington forever to rate highly his eternal Eliot. It is because Eliot is a subtle conformist. It tickles the palate of this archbishop of procurers to a lecherous antiquity to hold up Prufrock as a New World type. (KH, 24)

Williams sees that Eliot has the potential to be a great American poet, but that Eliot's strengths are not being used to their proper end, and therefore have no value: "Every time American strength goes into a mold modeled after the English, it is wholly wasted" (SE, 87).

Eliot further distanced himself from the relationship between art and American culture by entering the bastions of academe, where he could relate contemporary art to past art and could teach young Americans to do the same:

> There is a heresy, regarding the general character of poetry, which has become widely prevalent today and may shortly become more so through academic fostering*: it is, that poetry increases in virtue as it is removed from contact with a vulgar world. (CII, 1:3, 131)

Williams' asterisk refers to "T. S. Eliot's appointment at Harvard" where, Williams believes, Eliot would teach English, not American culture. Williams is justifiably concerned about the lack of university courses in American literature and history, and about the way that literature is taught in universities. He believes that in American universities literature is related to other literature, particularly European literature, rather than to life, and that Eliot's presence at Harvard is indicative of the kind of critical values taught in universities.

Contact with the local culture "cannot be taught" (EK, 52) because it is experience itself, and therefore the lesson learned by the contemporary poet from the masters must be in spirit rather than kind. Williams considers that anyone who, because he copies the classics, considers himself to be a classicist, does not understand the nature of the classics. Eliot, however, in Notes towards the Definition of Culture, says, "And in poetry there is no such thing as complete originality, owing nothing to the past."[20] He argues too, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that if we do not, as Williams would have us do, approach a poet's work looking for differences between his work and the work of his predecessors, ". . . we shall often find that not only the best but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously."[21] For Eliot, then, the poet's knowledge of works of the past becomes an integral part of his own consciousness and his own expression.

Eliot, like Pound, is concerned with all of history and all of literary history, without particular regard for the literature and history of his own nation, his own place. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot expresses the view that the background of literature is all of literary history, and that the writer must work to keep this literary history in mind:

> It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.[22]

Unlike Williams, who wants to ignore literature of the past as much as possible, Eliot tries to reinterpret the past within a modern consciousness. He believes that the individual artist becomes part of a pattern that has been established in ages past, but from Williams' perspective tradition is based upon the works of individual artists throughout history, each of whom was in contact with his own period and whose work gives expression to that period, which lives on in the work.

According to Williams, tradition continues only in the spirit of creativity, "a springtime of the soul" in which everything is seen anew (IAG, 196). It is this spirit, evident in the classics, to which the contemporary artist responds:

> These things represent men who lived and felt the desire to write just as he does, who wrote fresh from the whole body and who went on living after. Something hard has remained. It is desire. To live cannot be learned from the writings of others. It is the life of writing that comes from the inside. The classics prove it. (EK, 106)

Williams believes that ". . . the classic lives now just as it did then--or not at all" (SL, 130), depending on its relationship to the life of the age in which it was created. He indicates that the true followers of tradition are not those who copy their masters, trying to create according to a pre-conceived set of rules prescribed in another place and time; the attempt to copy means, to Williams, only death: "Those who see it one way call it the defense of tradition. Others see tradition belied in that tradition was once new--now only a wall" (SE, 204).

The premise of Williams' argument against the expression of traditional values and traditional subjects in art is that when art relies upon ideas, rather than upon the actual experiences of its creator, it remains merely a dream or a fantasy. In Paterson, the library, which burns down, had been full of "Dead men's dreams, confined by these walls" (P, 100), so the destruction of the library opens possibilities of a new art that is based more closely on reality than any art of the past had been: "There was then a subject matter that was 'poetic' and in many minds that is still poetry--and exclusively so--the 'beautiful' or pious (and so beautiful) wish expressed in beautiful language--a dream" (SE, 282). For Williams, the "Beautiful Thing" is "the dream of dead men" (P, 122), not of modern men. He believes that we must "waken from our dreams" (SE, 283)--that in the twentieth century "reality has struggled to assert itself above phantasy--a reality which our present world demands."[23] According to Williams, poetry, like prose, can reveal "the gutter" of the actual world (SL, 263).

Williams' goal, therefore, and the goal he sets for artists, is to evaluate the new, ". . . but without tradition. On its apparent merits" (R, 30). Ironically, however, he views the rejection of past standards as a service to tradition because he believes that what we see from the vantage of the present is a series of works that convey their own time and place, not a series of works that relate to one another. The tradition, then, is recognizable only after the works that become part of that tradition have been created. Therefore, the retention of past standards as models for contemporary works is not a continuation of the tradition, it is merely "plagiarism of tradition":

> It may be said that I wish to destroy the past. It is precisely a service to tradition, honoring it and serving it that is envisioned and intended by my attack, and not disfigurement--confirming and enlarging its application. (SE, 284)

The judgment of the editors of Contact, as expressed by McAlmon, is that "T. S. Eliot will not be a critic in any worthy sense" because he has standards of judgment that are themselves incorrect. The title of Eliot's own magazine, The Criterion, itself suggests that Eliot's values are static and that, as McAlmon says, ". . . he continually relates literature to literature, and largely overlooks the relation of literature to reality--age, age qualities, and environment" (CI, 2, 10).

But Williams, as a consequence of his belief that "place is everything," argues that the ability of the work of art to convey the conditions of the artist's experience, rather than its use of or manipulation of traditional artistic values and conventions, must be of primary concern to artists and critics alike:

> Reject completely literary criteria of work . . . because there is a quality which is the essence of what is good, which literary rules do not measure--whereas the very death of excellence measured by the "rule" is every day rated highly. (When a thing has died, in the sense of Eliot's Waste Land--or whatever it may be, and this death is identified with the spring of literature itself--it will be found that the death has not been properly designated, that it has been the death of something unsuspected--and that a man of that sort of perception will turn to traditionalism, taking the death as their material.) Beginning: Nothing less is intended than a revolution in thought with the writing as the fulcrum, by means of which--and

> the accidental place, any place, therefore America--one like another, therefore where we happen to be, our locality, as base. (EK, 97-98)

Williams believes that the whole way of thinking about art must be revolutionized when the dominant ideas about it are based on rules and conventions, because the measure of art is in its ability to reveal the artist's culture rather than its proximity to traditional patterns of thought. The editors of Contact offer a place in their magazine to anyone who reveals that he writes from a perspective that is not limited by traditional standards, but is based upon "standards which reality as the artist senses it creates" (CI, 1, 1).

Therefore, although Williams is concerned with cultural identity, he mistakenly assumes, ignoring historical evidence, that personal identity and cultural identity are based almost exclusively on environment and experience, not on ideas. In fact, from Williams' perspective, thought is determined by experience and environment. For Williams, the identification of the individual with his culture and his environment is inescapable; if a writer is part of a particular culture, he cannot escape it and should not try because that culture gives him at least part of his identity and gives his works an identity as well--he is simultaneously limited by and freed by his own cultural identity:

> Quickly, it is this: that every individual, every place, every opportunity of thought is both favored and limited by its emplacement in time and place. Chinese 8th cent., Italian 12th, English 15th, French 18th, African, etc. All sorts of complicated conditions and circumstances of land, climate, blood, surround every deed that is done. (EK, 149)

Each place, at any time, has its own unique qualities that characterize it and make it distinct, and contact with those characteristics plays a part in determining the character of the individual.

Williams himself, even though he enjoyed his visits to Europe and perhaps at times even wished that he could be European, recognized that he could never be anything but American because his American-ness had become a part of his own character:

> Paris would be wonderful if I could be French and Vieux; it would be still more wonderful if I could only want to forget everything on earth. Since I cannot do that, only America remains where at least I was born. (SL, 64)

Williams, over-simplifying whatever factors might cause someone to leave his native land (even to come to America), sees expatriatism as an attempt to escape the reality of one's own life. But such an escape is, in Williams' opinion, impossible, because an individual's cultural background, determined largely by environment, becomes a part of his own character, and because the particular culture is part of the universal human condition: "The only thing I have learned in my life is that you can't run away from your own life. When you go to China or London or Lima you won't find anything that isn't in your own back yard."[24] Ignoring the implications that this relationship between place of birth and personal identity has for Americans who were raised in England or other foreign countries, or for those who left America, Williams insists that the artist, instead of trying to escape the place where his character was formed, must express his experience of that place.

But despite his concern that the artist present his personal experience of his own locality, a concern which seems to dispel the possibility of historical events being dealt with in art, Williams recognizes that history plays a major role in determining the character of the present. In the American Grain (1925), Paterson (1946-1963), and the libretto for The First President (1936) exemplify Williams' awareness of the need for an historical sense in order to understand the present. The artist draws not only upon his own background and his own experiences, but also upon history; however, unlike Eliot, Williams draws upon the history of America itself, believing, as a letter he quotes in Paterson states, that ". . . a place is made of memories as well as the world around it" (P, 210). Whereas Eliot, and Pound, see American culture merely as a part of a much larger western civilization, for Williams, "The background of America is not Europe but America" (GAN, 195), and if Europe and America have ideological positions in common, they are positions that they only "partly share" (SE, 157): "Here/ is not there,/ and never will be" (P, 211). With some justification, therefore, Williams argues that because America is a place distinguishable from other places, so it has its own culture--just as eighteenth-century French culture is distinguishable from fifteenth-century English culture, so American culture is distinguishable from other cultures, despite attempts by European settlers to destroy it: "The old cultures cannot, can never without our history, our blood or climate, our time of flowering in history--can never be the same as we. They cannot" (EK, 150).

But Williams, even in recognizing the importance of place and history, often ignores the distinct regions that might exist within a given area of land and the distinct differences that colonization by various European nations have made to regions of North America. In In the American Grain, he views all of North America as one American locality. In his writings on French Canada, which are particularly offensive, Williams admonishes France for trying to make North America French:

> It is the weakness of you French--planting a drop of your precious blood in outlandish veins, in the wilderness and fancying that that addition makes them French--that by this the wilderness is converted! civilized, a new link in the chain. Never. Great as your desire may be. (IAG, 74)

But Williams himself denies the very existence of French-Canadian culture, which is not the culture of France, the United States, or the land, now Quebec, as it existed before the arrival of the French. Historically, the influence of foreign culture, and its adaptation to a new land, plays a part in the development of any locality, but Williams dogmatically persists in seeing foreign influence as negative influence rather than as historical fact:

> Nor is this solely an American difficulty. It is seen in such things as the steady decay of life in the Shetland Islands, while the Faroes, less favorably situated to the north, too far for exploitation by the London markets, have begun a regeneration under a rediscovered genius of place. A like impetus is behind the bombing by a young and patriotic Breton of the memorial celebrating the absorption of Britanny by a greater France. The attempt of an unrelated culture upon a realistic genius of place is deeply involved in these events, as in the undying movement to free Ireland.
>
> But in America the struggle was brilliant and acute. It was also on a vaster scale. (SE, 145)

Primarily, then, Williams is fighting for an American literary identity distinct from European literature. He wants American literature to meet the various literatures of the world at their level, as a literature in its own right: "I do not overlook De Gourmont's plea for a meeting of the nations, but I do believe that when they meet Paris will be more than slightly abashed to find parodies of the middle ages, Dante and langue d'oc foisted upon it as the best in United States poetry" (KH, 26). But, in making a sensible point, Williams takes an overly aggressive and militant stance against European culture because he believes that if America is to add anything of its own to the corpus of world literature, European tradition has to be viewed as an imperialistic power that is trying to retain its hold on the colonies. For Williams, all aspects of European culture have to be resisted: "For the moment I hate you, I hate your orchestras, your libraries, your sciences, your yearly salons, your finely tuned intelligences of all sorts" (GAN, 175-76). His view of the relationship between culture and locality both defines the problem, which is for him to discover what American culture is, and its solution, which is to look at the particular elements of America itself.

Williams understands that the best way to destroy the power of an unrelated culture is to ignore it and to focus on the immediate environment, as he thinks artists everywhere do. American artists therefore cannot copy works done by artists of other cultures, but can learn from these other artists to express their own culture: "And if we cannot do work comparable to theirs, in its differences as in its comprehensiveness, then we cannot say that we, as they were, are alive. Our world is not real to us."[25] If the artist is American and he reveals what he comes in contact with in America, then his work will be American, and what it means to be American, the American-ness of the work, is determined after the work itself. Neither the artist nor the critic, according to Williams, should approach the work with pre-conceived ideas about how this American-ness will manifest itself in the work of art:

> What shall be seen then in America? Nothing French surely. What is there to see? A tree--it's been painted a myriad times from the Renaissance background down to Derain.
>
> Well, what does one see? to paint? Why the tree, of course, is the facile answer. Not at all. The tree as a tree does not exist literally, figuratively or any way you please--for the appraising eye of the artist--or any man--the tree does not exist. What does exist, and in heightened intensity for

> the artist is the impression created by the shape and color of an object before him in his sensual being--his whole body (not his eyes) his body, that is what he sees--And in America--escape it he cannot--it is an American tree.
>
> Render that in pigment and he asserts his own existence and that of men about him--he becomes prophet and seer--in so far as he is wholly worthy to be so. (EK, 24-25)

The technique with which to discover what America is, is therefore to reveal the particular. In Contact Williams indicates his preference for Marianne Moore's selection of "more delicate," individual objects, rather than the all-encompassing "windy-prairie tradition" of Whitman (CI, 2, 1). For Williams, the local and the particular become synonymous:

> That is the poet's business. Not to talk in vague categories but to write particularly, as a physician works, upon a patient, upon the thing before him, in the particular to discover the universal. John Dewey had said (I discovered it quite by chance), "The local is the only universal, upon that all art builds." (A, 391)

The artist, then, sees with "his whole body (not his eyes) his body," and that which he senses is of his culture and must be revealed in art in order to reveal the culture: "Reveal the object. By that we touch authentically the profundity of its attachments--if we are able. But able or otherwise there is no other way for us" (CII, 1:2, 109). The artist does not perform his function by presenting his ideas about the culture, but by revealing that culture through the things that exist in it and are created by it, so that both he and his audience get their ideas about the culture from the culture itself, not from abstract ideas. Williams believes that, in art, ". . . it is inconceivable that, no matter how circuitously, contact with an immediate objective world has not been rigorously maintained. By artist is meant nearly this thing alone" (CI, 3, 14).

Williams fears that even he will be lured by the past, that he will "run for cover" and "seek refuge in fantasy," though he wishes to confront the situation at hand and is "not in search of 'the beautiful illusion'" (SA, 89). For the most part, Williams' works do reveal American culture. He seldom alludes to other works, though Kora in Hell: Improvisations (1920) is a notable exception. The majority of the early poems are short, imagistic expressions of the specific things such as "The Desolate Field" or the "Approach of Winter" that give poems their titles. Often, as in "The Raper from Passenack" or "Impromptu: The Suckers," a specific incident becomes the basis of a poem. Kenneth Burke calls Williams "the master of the glimpse"[26] because even the sight of a young housewife out to do her morning shopping, standing "shy, uncorseted, tucking in/ stray ends of hair," is enough to elicit a poem from Williams (CEP, 136). The objects and the people that Williams depicts are part of his community and of his life.

But these "glimpses" of the minute details of those people and things with which Williams came into contact are for him a way to understand the much larger implications of his community, his nation, and the world in which he lives. As early as 1918, when Williams was writing Kora in Hell, he understood that in any city exists the complete range of human concerns, so that if an artist could understand and express the concerns of that place, he could produce work of universal applicability: "You would learn--if you knew even one city--where people are a little gathered together and where one sees--it's our frontier you know--the common changes of the human spirit . . ." (KH, 49); yet by the time he wrote about that city, which was for him Paterson, New Jersey, he understood that to know a locale even the size of a city, which he calls "the whole knowable world about me," the poet must look first at the particular details of that city, and get to know the people themselves, "to the whites of their eyes, to their very smells" (A, 391):

> To make a start,
> out of particulars
> and make them general, rolling
> up the sum, by defective means--
> (P, 3)

According to Williams, then, not only is it necessary to understand the local in order to understand the universal, it is also necessary to understand the particulars of the locality in order to understand the locale itself.

Williams himself states that "the genesis of Paterson" was in 1913 when he wrote "The Wanderer," in which the persona is immersed in "the filthy Passaic" (CEP, 11). In fact, the whole body of Williams' work might be considered to be his attempt to understand and to express his "knowable world," the life along the Passaic River, in order to discover what could be found in America and what American culture has to offer. Although Williams' own emphasis on place, and on actuality, may not be an accurate measure of artistic merit, it does provide an impetus for art, and it offers an alternative to the critical perspective of Eliot, and of critics such as Yvor Winters, whose "standards of critical judgment" are, at times, based on such vague criteria as "certain feelings of rightness and completeness, which have been formed in some measure, refined in a large measure, through a study of the masters."[27]

CHAPTER 2

AMERICA: THE WORLD FOREVER NEW

> Strange and difficult, the new continent induced a torsion in the spirits of the first settlers, tearing them between the old and the new. And at once a split occurred in that impetus which should have carried them forward as one into the dangerous realities of the future.
>
> They found that they had not only left England but that they had arrived somewhere else: at a place whose pressing reality demanded not only a tremendous bodily devotion but as well, and more importunately, great powers of adaptability, a complete reconstruction of their most intimate cultural make-up, to accord with the new conditions. The most hesitated and turned back in their hearts at first glance. (SE, 134)

> A new world/ is only a new mind. (PB, 76)

Despite his concern with the actual world, places and the events that occur in places, Williams understands that America is not only a land to be discovered through "sensual contact," it is an ideology as well. The American artist must, according to Williams, immerse himself in the American ideology as well as in the place itself. Williams himself formulates an idea of America in which, paradoxically, American ideology is based on mistrust of abstract ideas or concepts that are not given credence by actual experience. He justifies his own conception of America by basing it on the records of American history (the words of those men and women of the past who were a part of that history), even though events of American history and experiences of American daily life are not always compatible with his idea of America.[1] Williams himself recognizes events in American history and aspects of American society, particularly the destruction of native North American cultures and the emphasis on money, of which he is justly critical. But even though he recognizes these flaws, he is not critical of American ideology; in fact, he cannot accept that the flaws are American, because he sees them as being contrary to American ideology. While Williams insists that artists must focus on actuality, the contact theory, in which this insistence is stated, is based on democratic individualism, pragmatism, and revolution against tyranny, all of which he sees as inherent in the American ideology. American failures, in Williams' view, result from failure to keep in contact with the environment,[2] and indicate, to him, the failure to accept American ideology. Immersed in the American ideology, however, Williams does not recognize his own prejudices and the chauvinism of his own contact theory, because he does not see prejudices or flaws in the American ideology itself.

However, Dickran Tashjian's claim, in the introduction to A Recognizable Image, that Williams believes artists should not be influenced by the "ideological structures" of the world around them, is partially correct.[3] Williams states that contact with the actual locality must be maintained "in contradistinction to standards of social, moral or scholastic value--hangovers from past generations no better equipped to ascertain value than we are" (CI, 1, 1); yet he also desires to write poems that are ideologically and politically authentically American, and in order to do so, he must accept the American ideology. He sees Eliot's and Pound's inability to stay in America as a failure to enter into the unknown, and a failure to see the potential that the unknown holds:

> I have maintained from the first that Eliot and Pound by virtue of their hypersensitivity (which is their greatness) were too quick to find a culture (the English continental) ready made

> for their assertions. They ran from something else, something cruder but, at the same time, newer, more dangerous but heavy with rewards for the sensibility that could reap them. They couldn't. Or didn't. But they both ended by avoiding not only the possibilities offered but, at the same time, the deeper implications intellectually which our nascent culture accented. (SL, 226-27)

But Williams, like Boone and De Soto, accepts his environment, wild and coarse as it may be, and simultaneously possesses and is possessed by America; he surrenders to it, like the protagonist of "The Wanderer," who is immersed in "the filthy Passaic":

"Enter, youth, into this bulk!
Enter, river, into this young man!"
Then the river began to enter my heart,
Eddying back cool and limpid
Into the crystal beginnings of its days.
But with the rebound it leaped forward:
Muddy, then black and shrunken
Till I felt the utter depth of its rottenness
The vile breadth of its degradation
And dropped down knowing this was me now.
(CEP, 11)

In 1939, when Horace Gregory was preparing to write an introduction to a new edition of In the American Grain, Williams wrote to him concerning the incentive to write about American history and to learn about America itself; he says that he wants to "possess" America by "orienting" himself in "the beliefs which activated [him] from day to day" (SL, 185). Williams understands that he has been engrained with the beliefs of the society in which he is educated and in which he lives. But he believes that in most societies the perceptions of an individual who has been taught the values of his society are limited by what he has been taught because he approaches life with pre-conceived ideas about what it should be like. Williams does not recognize the value of any system that does not give highest value to individualism and liberty, which he sees as fundamental American beliefs. American society, theoretically at least, values the contributions of each individual, and these individual contributions, along with the belief in individual liberty that allows for them, become the American social perspective--e pluribus unum. Williams believes, then, that American belief in individualism and liberty makes them without prejudice, even though he admits that he owes "plenty of allegiances" to America, and that he feels emotional about America,"--the regular Fourth of July stuff!" Ironically, however, he feels part of a society of which he would "conceive of as having patience, tolerance, no prejudices whatever but a keen sense for values" (Int, 83).

Williams' approach is, in one sense, contradictory, but given his understanding of American ideology, it is a manifestation of that ideology. J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur understands, though Williams does not, that all ideologies involve prejudices. St. John de Crèvecoeur, like Williams, distinguishes between American ideology and the ideologies of Europe, and he also sees the American ideology as an ideology of the new, in relation to the past, in Europe. But, in answer to the question, "What is an American?" St. John de Crèvecoeur, unlike Williams, says that an American is someone who has exchanged European prejudices for American ones: "He is an American, who, leaving behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds."[4] Williams desires to avoid "ideological structures" in that he hopes to avoid prejudices, but he also mistakenly believes that by adopting an American perspective he avoids prejudice. Williams does not, as Dijkstra says he does, attempt to present "objective reality" objectively or to deny that individuals are taught particular ideologies, but his belief that the American ideology itself is a liberal, tolerant ideology that is also a denial of all prejudice, is, as Dijkstra says, "ideologically determined delusion" (ARI, 18).

Williams gives no indication that he is aware of his own prejudices or the prejudices inherent in American ideology. He begins "by asserting that individual genius is the basis of all social excellence whether as inventor, organizer, or governor" (ARI, 104), and he seems to believe, as Thomas Jefferson did, that this assertion is a "self-evident" truth. Because Williams believes in liberty and equality for individuals, he believes that he is being tolerant and open to all possibilities, but he fails to admit the potential of any other system besides democratic individualism. He chauvinistically argues that the American system is the best system--the most humane, the most modern and therefore the most suitable to the twentieth century, and the best able to remain constantly modern because it remains in contact with the changing world. According to Williams, Americans have an ideology which, because it is based on contact with immediate conditions and because it is a liberal ideology, cannot be considered to be static, as ideologies of the past have been. Williams believes that other ideologies have fixed, particular goals, whereas American ideology's only aim is to stay in contact with the concerns at hand. But, most important, he accepts the American myth that the new land and the new ideology have created a new man whose perception is not hindered by the oppressive past.

Williams' "approach to the poem" is equated by him with "an approach to a possible continent"; yet despite the chapters on Pere Rasles and Cortez in In the American Grain, which deal with Canada and Mexico, Williams' concern is not with the actual continent, but with the United

States, and even then more specifically with the potential of the United States, rather than with what actually exists there. But, as Leslie Fiedler explains, America has adopted as its identity the image of the new world of seemingly endless possibilities, and even though Canada and Mexico are as new to Europeans as the United States is,

> . . . only the United States has accepted the glorified the notion of newness as its essential character, its fate, its vocation. To be new, to make it new, to get a new start: that has become a program on which an American can be elected to public office or launch a poetic career.[5]

The myth of the new man, "the American Adam" as R. W. B. Lewis calls him, seeing everything for the first time and retaining a fresh outlook, unhindered by the veil of morality and convention that blinds Europeans to reality, has been accepted by America, where, Fiedler states, ". . . everyone is young, just as everything is new--not in fact, perhaps, but mythologically, by definition, which is all that counts in a new world."[6]

Williams sees this relationship between America and newness, but he fails to keep it in its proper perspective as mythology; he sees it as the historical background on which American ideology is based:

> One might go on to develop the point from this that the American addition to world culture will always be the "new," in opposition to an "old" represented by Europe. But that isn't satisfactory. What it is actually is something much deeper: a relation to the immediate conditions of the matter in hand, and a determination to assert them in opposition to all intermediate authority. Deep in the pattern of the newcomers' minds was impressed that conflict between present reliance on the prevalent conditions of place and the overriding of an unrelated authority. (SE, 143)

The desire to stay in contact with "the immediate conditions" involves, according to Williams, the rejection of "all intermediate authority," as the Declaration of Independence is a rejection of British authority by replacing it with local government attuned to what Williams calls the "real" conditions at hand. In touch with the "reality" of a recently discovered land, or in contact with ever-changing conditions, America remains, for Williams, forever new:

> Not that this direct drive toward the new is a phenomenon distinctively confined to America: it is the growing edge in every culture. But the difficulties encountered in settling the new ground did make it a clearer necessity in America--or should have done so--clearer than it could have been shown to be otherwise or elsewhere. To Americans the effort to appraise the real through a maze of a cut-off and imposed culture from Europe has been a vivid task, if very often too great for their realizations. Thus the new and the real, hard to come at, are synonymous. (SE, 143)

In Williams' opinion, therefore, even the kind of political system adopted in the United States, a form new to the world and based in America, is itself dependent upon the conditions at hand, and changes as public opinion changes. Although other nations have become democratic, in America the change was revolutionary, and it has lasted. Williams has a naive presumption that American democracy can adapt rapidly to the stimulus of the moment, and he relates the "democratic" and the "local (in the sense of being attached with integrity to actual experience)" (Nov, 351). According to Williams, the democratic spirit of America denies tradition because by its very nature it must remain in contact with the conditions at hand, and because historically it is a rejection of traditional European political systems, which themselves were based on European ideological positions. Democracy is the expression of American ideology in the tradition of Jefferson and the Founding Fathers of that country; yet, paradoxically, democracy itself is the denial of tradition. The abstract, ideological position of America is, then, not to believe in abstract ideology, and to be progressive by reacting to immediate needs.

Williams feels that in a democracy the ideological position cannot be fixed or static, and in his vocabulary, locality, the particular, democracy, reality, and newness are almost synonymous, and all are part of his view of America.

In fact, even Williams' view that culture exists in the present and in a particular place rather than as an ideological perspective is based on his interpretation of American ideology. In Contact, McAlmon praises Eliot's early poems, but criticizes him for becoming "a victim of the culture via ideas regime, more insistently the autocrat of the English mind than it is of the American" (CI, 2, 9). Williams too sees this distinction between European and American views of culture. He had learned from John Dewey's essay "Americanism and Localism"[7] that the demands placed upon the European settlers by the new environment brought about the development of a new culture. In order to stay alive, the settlers were forced to adapt to the new world, and they became creative and productive in industry and agriculture especially:

> The most effective drive of local realization came . . . in practical inventiveness. Crude, at first, necessitous, immediate, hand-to-mouth, that was the first test. There it could not afford to wait on anything. It had to be cut and go. (SE, 149)

Williams' view of American and localism, and Dewey's view as well, have a precedent in St. John de Crèvecoeur, who states that American "opinions, vices, and virtues, are altogether local: we are machines fashioned by every circumstance around us."[8] Nor are Williams' attempts to associate art with the life of the culture in which the artist lives without precedent in American letters.[9] In "The Poet" Emerson states: "We do not with sufficient plainness or sufficient profoundness address ourselves to life, nor dare we chaunt our own times and social circumstance."[10] And Thoreau reveals a stance very similar to Williams' when he says, "Whatever things I perceive with my entire man, those let me record, and it will be poetry."[11] Williams' ideas regarding the relationship between art and locality, and art and experience, can be related to ideology and aesthetics expressed by other Americans, and in this sense they are distinctively American, as Williams wanted them to be. But Williams' own ideas, despite his arguments to the contrary, are limited by their contact with American ideology.

The practical need to stay in contact with the environment coincides, according to Williams, with the American political ideology of civic, state, and national governments with elected representatives who speak for local concerns and who are responsible to the people of their constituencies. Williams is concerned primarily with the system established so that change can occur when it is desired by the people, whereas Ezra Pound is critical of the lack of use made of that system by the people:

> The degradation in America is phenomenal in that legally the machinery for local resilience EXISTS, all the cadres, frames for local organization are nicely plotted out, many of them have functioned, but the populace AND the intelligentsia are now too lazy, cowardly and ignorant to make use of them.[12]

Williams continues to see only the ideological aspect of American democracy, not the country itself, and it remains for him a revolutionary new ideology.

But because, in Williams' conception, Europe is the past and America the modern world, he ignores the development of democratic principles and democratic governments elsewhere in the world. In Williams' conception of the world, change can occur in Europe only through violence of one tyranny against another, and that violence establishes new tyrannies. Williams was in Europe before the First World War, and he saw the war approaching. In a letter to his brother, Williams writes from Germany about the tyranny of Europe and about his belief that such tyranny could not exist in America:

> Give me my country where there is water to drink and freedom such as they only dream of here. You can say what you want about rotten politics but it's rotten because I want it rotten but when I want it clean it will be clean, but here only bloodshed can wipe out tyranny. There is all the difference in the world between the two. (SL, 18-19)

American democracy represents to Williams a flexible structure that changes internally as the need arises, so that it is always in contact with the immediate circumstances, unlike more rigid philosophical concepts such as those on which monarchies, or even Marxism, are based, and which remain fixed. Although Williams admits that ". . . the original conception of a revolutionary America, in the minds of such agitators as Samuel Adams, Freneau and some others, was not very different from the objective of those advocating a classless society today," he recognizes that the belief in equality, in America, is accompanied by "a respect for personal liberty which is basic. So from the history we have side by side: equality and liberty" (ARI, 100-101). The American Revolution is exemplary, according to Williams, because it did not merely replace a monarchical system based in Europe with a monarchical system of its own. The American Revolution is seen by Williams as a "real revolution of thought":

> The gist of it was human liberty, that is, the right to self determination in matters involving local affairs as well as conscience. It was opposed by the classic sense of a central, arbitrary authority--in London. (SE, 39)

Liberality of thought is essential to the maintenance of individual liberty: "Small minds too narrowly restricted to a single viewpoint are always more dangerous to a democracy than any enemy attacking from the outside."[13]

But because America has as its goal not only liberty but equality as well, the individual is not absolutely free to do as he pleases; he must keep in mind at all times the equal rights of others and his social responsibilities: "A rebel in a Jeffersonian sense, the individual must always be--like Galileo, even like Henry Ford, if society is to advance to its goal of the greatest good for the greatest number" (ARI, 107). "A Rebel in a Jeffersonian sense" must walk a fine line between self and other, as America itself must balance the rights of the individual and the good of society. Although, because of the break from Europe, the word "freedom" has become and remains "the commonly accepted symbol" of America, Williams argues that "Liberty is the better word" because it implies that "discipline" is necessary and it "has the significance of inclusion rather than a breaking away" (SE, 208-209). In the American social structure, then, an individual must keep in mind simultaneously his conception of his "self," or his individuality, and the realization that he is only "part of the whole." Conversely, the social structure must be such that it recognizes its own composition as a group of individuals who may have differing needs and desires, and therefore establish itself as a body to restrain any individual or small group from dictating to the group as a whole. The bond that should hold the society together is its desire to protect the individual's liberties from what Williams calls "adverse weather"--those forces that erode civil liberty. This joint effort to maintain civil liberty is, according to Williams, the basis of American society: "The real character of the people became their joint and skilful resistance to the weather" (SE, 209).

In America, the balance between an individual's freedom to pursue his own goals and his hindrance of others in their pursuits is, as Williams understands, extremely fragile. Williams' comments regarding the distinctions between freedom and liberty are notably insightful, and his interpretation of the relationship between contact with the local environment and the maintenance of liberty help to explain why he feels that such contact by the artist is a necessary approach to art for any American artist.

Williams explains that while the push for freedom was once necessary in order to break the colonial bonds with Europe, ". . . it went too far"; whereas it was once "pro-social," greed has made unrestricted individualism "anti-social" (ARI, 101). The American obsession with money, and American ingenuity, have led to "practical" uses of science--inventions that speed up processes and, in Williams' words, "increase the gap between touch and thing, not to have a contact" (IAG, 177).

Individual freedom and practical inventiveness are correctly relegated by Williams to a status of secondary importance in American ideology. For him, unrestricted individualism and free enterprise are not central to that ideology, even though he recognizes that the measure of quality in America has become saleability, which is, according to Williams, a "false standard" (ARI, 108). Williams considers that the individual is not controlled in America, and that Americans must

". . . find precisely where this creature went out of control, at the same time preserving, if possible, our traditional basis for social regenerative power in a free creative opportunity for him" (ARI, 102). They must, however, resist the temptation to curb individual liberties, because oppression is not a solution to the problems of an economic system gone awry: "The danger of the present is that general liberty shall be taken away in the attempt to curb the unrestricted play of individualism--as if there were no other cure" (ARI, 101-102).

"(Revolutions Revalued:) The Attack on Credit Monopoly from a Cultural Point of View" again reveals Williams' propensity to offer solutions that he feels are typically American, and again shows his concern with the maintenance of individual liberty, not total freedom, as the basis of American ideology. Williams was convinced by Pound that Social Credit, not "the fiasco in Alberta, Canada" (ARI, 100), is an alternative to the loss of individual liberty.[14] Individuals and banks had, in Williams' opinion, abused their freedom by amassing credit monopolies that curtailed the rights of others. Williams advocates Social Credit policies because he sees them as policies for "LOCAL control of local purchasing/ power" (P, 218). But he denies that his is a political perspective, claiming instead that it is a humane perspective, the perspective of an artist:

> Speaking as a writer interested in the principles of the Social Credit movement advocated by Major Douglas, and not as a technical expert, let me approach the subject from that camp, as an ordinary thinking, feeling human being--one who has read a few books carefully and who was born and lives in the United States. It makes a difference. A humane viewpoint. At its best the cultural viewpoint. (ARI, 97)

The most important implication of this humane viewpoint, the American cultural viewpoint, is that the individual in contact with his environment must consider that he will live amidst what he creates, or destroys. Therefore, he must take into consideration his society and the environment itself; only those who have no connection with the place itself can act out of pure selfishness.

The fortune hunters who, to use Williams' own image, rape and plunder the land, taking what they can from it and from those who are in contact with it, are not in contact with the American environment or the American ideology; they are looking eastward, back out across the Atlantic towards Europe: "Meanwhile an unrelated Hopi ceremonial--unrelated, that is, except to the sand, the corn, the birds, the beasts, the periodic drought, and the mountain sights and colors--was living in the farther West" (SE, 146). While the Indians lived in contact with the land, the fortune hunters seek only to use the environment for their own purposes. They are the conquerors, like Cortez (IAG, 27-38), whose spiritual descendents might be those such as Gurlie in the Stecher trilogy, who single-mindedly pushes her husband on, forcing him to make his business grow.

Other Europeans, however, like De Soto (IAG, 45-58), come to conquer the New World, but are seduced by the land itself, and give themselves to the new environment. According to Williams, after De Soto died his body was taken by the Indians "out in a canoe and committed to the middle of the stream," where it became a "solitary sperm," to consummate his love for the New World, of which he had become a part (IAG, 58). Rod Townley aptly calls this acceptance of the New World "possession by surrender,"[15] and it is, for Williams, the only way that anyone might truly possess a land without destroying its inherent qualities.

As D. H. Lawrence states in a review of In the American Grain, Williams sees two alternatives for Americans. The first is to recoil "into individual smallness and insentience, and gutting the great continent in frenzies of mean fear. It is the Puritan way. The other is by touch; touch America as she is; dare to touch her! And this is the heroic way."[16] Dickran Tashjian reiterates this opinion, stating that In the American Grain is "shaped by Williams' theory of contact":

> Thus he disapproves of the Puritans because they retained their European theology. The wilderness tightened their grip upon European culture. In contrast, Daniel Boone is drawn as the hero who gave himself to the wilderness. . . .[17]

In In the American Grain and elsewhere in his writings, Williams repeatedly uses the image of movement inland to reveal the degree of contact achieved by early Americans. While figures such as Boone, De Soto, and Père Rasles had moved inland and adapted to the new surroundings, others constantly yearned to be back in the familiar surroundings of Europe.

Boone, particularly, is idealized by Williams:

> The significance of Boone and the others of his time and trade was that they abandoned touch with those along the coast, and their established references, and made contact with the intrinsic elements of an as yet unrealized material of which the new country was made. (SE, 140)

Williams calls Boone's contact with the New World an act of "genius," but Boone, as a result of his immersion in the wilderness along with the others who had moved inland, became crude and ill-mannered (SE, 141). Boone and his companions lost the conventional manners and customs of the Europeans; yet they began a culture of their own:

> They themselves became part of the antagonistic wilderness against which the coastal settlements were battling. Their sadness alone survives. Many of them could hardly read. Their speech became crude. Their manners sometimes offensive. It was the penalty they had to pay.
>
> It was a curious anomaly. They in themselves had achieved a culture, an adjustment to the conditions about them, which was of the first order, and which, at the same time, oddly cut them off from the others. (SE, 141)

Only by maintaining their independence from the other more European settlers, and by moving deeper into America and American ideology, could the settlers form a new culture. By daring to enter the unknown, men such as Columbus and Boone had opened up a new world of possibilities, and the spirit of discovery became, according to Williams, the spirit of America. He believes that this spirit must be evident in American literature, and that the literature should express the liberal-mindedness and political flexibility associated with America itself. Like Poe, who Williams says "faced inland, to originality" (IAG, 226), and Whitman, who moved inland to Camden, the poet in Paterson "headed inland, followed by the dog" (P, 203).

In "The Writers of the American Revolution," as the title itself indicates, Williams argues that the real revolution did not take place on a military level, but in the written expression of the values that had become associated with America itself. In the actual document "The Declaration of Independence," Thomas Jefferson brings to "highest fruition the basic democratic philosophy which had first inspired S. Adams" (SE, 49). Williams creates the impression that this revolutionary democratic philosophy was simultaneously caused by and responsible for a revolutionary new literature that is written by those who share this philosophy:

> They were of all types, diplomats, ministers of the gospel, and some, like Washington, soldiers as well. Such men as Franklin the urbanity of whose prose style, acceptable to the French court, played its part in winning the French to America as an ally--Tom Paine, Freneau, Jefferson. They were not unopposed. But the Tory element whose weapon was in the main virulent satire produced no such works as the patriot. (SE, 45)

Williams views those writers who are not trying to adapt to the possibilities offered by the new world as conservatives in both literature and politics, and he argues that those who teach subservience to masters in art are as dangerous as those who teach "subservience to the actual leaders" instead of teaching the value of liberty itself.

Williams recognizes that there is a "Tory element" in American literature, and as Roy Harvey Pearce has made clear, it has been a major force,[18] but for Williams the uniquely American literature is that which is concerned with the liberal values that are associated with revolutionary America, and which were brought about by the possibilities offered by the new land. He sees American literary independence, which had been fought for by writers such as Whitman, being taken away again by Eliot, who values English political, religious, and social traditions, and who looks to Europe for models of great art: "The drift was plainly away from all that was native to America, Whitman among the rest, and toward the study of the past and England."[19] This conservative, counter-revolutionary spirit in art Williams sees as analogous to the spirit of those who wished only to use America as a supply depot for the old world and as a place where they could make their fortunes and leave--those British Empire Loyalists who did not see the potential of America itself. But Williams is not advocating a return to an idyllic past; he recognizes that the past, whatever qualities it may have had, cannot be regained. Like Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, and Whitman before him, he is encouraging the creation of art that is indigenous to America in the same way that Indian culture had been.

The choice for the artist becomes, therefore, either to turn back to Europe in search of models, or to be a part of what Williams calls the "new vision--rich and varied as its political history" (ARI, 215), that had been necessary in order to discover America and to found a new nation independent from England. The question becomes, for Williams, "Is a man for or against the Revolution?" (ARI, 216). Williams' own answer to that question is stated firmly in Contact: "If Americans are to be blessed with important work it will be through intelligent, informed contact with the locality which alone can infuse it with reality" (CI, 4, 18). The literary revolution that Williams attempts to conduct is not fought by means of conflict with the Europeans, and the British in particular, but by turning away from them and concentrating on America itself:

> I came to look at poetry from a local viewpoint; I had to find out for myself; I'd had no instruction beyond high school literature. When I was inclined to write poems, I was definitely an American kid, confident of himself and also independent. From the beginning I felt I was not English. If poetry had to be written, I had to do it my own way. (IWWP, 14)

But neither Pound nor Eliot enter into this American revolution. Malcolm Cowley says that when the expatriates left America they rejected the convictions that are shared by Americans:

> They had been uprooted from something more than a birthplace, a country or a town. Their real exile was from society itself, from any society to which they could honestly contribute and from which they could draw the strength that lies in shared convictions.[20]

Pound and Eliot exemplify this alienation from American liberal-democratic attitudes, but both of them, contrary to the impression of expatriates presented by Cowley, do find, in Europe, a culture to which they feel more suited.

As J. Frederick Hoffman points out, "The genuine expatriates--Eliot and Pound especially--had never really thought of returning; Eliot because he was too much in love with things British, Pound because he hated too much the central democratic philosophy of American life and thought it uncongenial to the artist."[21] Although Eliot later said that he would not call himself "a 'royalist' toutcourt," instead favoring the retention of the monarchy "in every country in which a monarchy still exists,"[22] he does, in an infamous passage from the preface to For Lancelot Andrewes (1928), proclaim his allegiance to the old world, stating that his "general point of view may be described as classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion."[23] And although Pound himself believes that he speaks for Jefferson as well as Mussolini, Donald Davie points out that Pound, in Patria Mia (1913), accepts none of the values on which American culture is based:

> It is in any case highly significant that this, Pound's most obviously and explicitly American book should have a Latin title. He attempts to foresee a future for America according to paradigms he had learned about in Europe. Neither at this time nor afterwards does Pound share the conviction and the hope which as a matter of historical record have fired the cultural achievements of the white man in North America ever since Plymouth Plantation--the hope and belief that the new continent offered a new start, a new Eden for a new Adam, liberated from the corruptions and errors of Europe and forewarned by European history how to avoid European mistakes. On the contrary Pound takes it for granted that if America is ever to produce or become a civilization, it can do so only by modelling itself on European precedents, precedents that are ultimately or originally Greek and Roman.[24]

Only a man who has no faith in democratic principles, who believes that it is "composed one-third of peasant pessimism, one-third of laissez-aller, of utter indifference,"[25] could see a direct relationship between Jefferson and Mussolini, whose authority, as Pound himself states, comes, "as Eirugina proclaimed authority comes, 'from right reason' and from the general fascist conviction that he is more likely to be right than anyone else is."[26] Despite Pound's contributions to innovative writing, he could not accept the democratic liberalism of America, and, as Davie says, even his innovations are based on conservative beliefs: "And Pound's slogan, 'make it New', affords little comfort to the avant-garde; it is a recipe for conservation, for protecting past monuments in all their potency."[27]

Leslie Fiedler recognizes, as Williams had before him, that ". . . the American tradition, the tradition of the new, is precisely antiliteary, subversive . . ."[28] and that ". . . to be free to 'make it new' [American artists] must destroy the most recent old man, however dearly loved."[29] Fiedler says that historically they do this by parodying writers of the past,[30] but as Bram Dijkstra points out, Williams, like the photographer members of the Stieglitz group, realizes that America could be understood "by going back to the very basis of nature, the object."[31] This rejection of the past by focusing on the immediate is closer, also, to Williams' own view of America, where he says, "Without attachment to an essential reality, nothing could have lived in these closed-off areas" (SE, 148). Attachment to conditions at hand has been the basis of American success in creating its own culture, and it will do the same, according to Williams, in art:

> It has been by paying naked attention first to the thing itself that American plumbing, American shoes, American bridges, indexing systems, locomotives, printing presses, city buildings,

> farm implements and a thousand other things have become notable in the world. Yet we are timid in believing that in the arts discovery and invention will take the same course. And there is no reason why they should unless our writers have the inventive intelligence of our engineers and cobblers. (_CI_, 3, 15)

The lack of a long literary tradition and the ideological stance against tradition are, in Williams' view, advantages held by Americans, who are forced, therefore, to focus on the immediate conditions, which must be accepted on their own terms and which do not allow a systematic approach: "Our processes are for the moment chaotic but they have the distinct advantage of being able to claim no place of rest save immediacy" (_CI_, 3, 15).

Unfortunately then, although Williams advocates cultural relativity, he also indicates that American ideology gives American artists advantages over artists from any other places in the world. What is even more distressing, however, is that Williams' analogy of contact and American ideology implies that Americans, who adopt American ideological positions, have a monopoly on artistic sensibility, particularly modern artistic sensibility:

> There is a great cultural discovery, far more significant than a machine (where the superficial American genius lies) immanent --that will shoot out rays into EVERY department of life NOT KNOWLEDGE--rearranging it into CLARITY--so that its complications will grow plain--grouped, bagged--for pleasure, leisure-- (_R_, 21)

American values, in Williams' view, are modern values, substantiated by twentieth-century developments in science, and justified by lessons in morality taught by history. These values are embodied in Williams' image of "St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils" and, by staying in contact with actual events, they remain constantly modern.

Only by expressing these American values, therefore, because they are synonymous in Williams' mind with modernity, does the artist express the modern world. Attention to local details, tolerance, and "no prejudices whatever," those values that Williams believes characterize America, for him characterize the modern in art. As the possibilities presented by the new world had given rise to the existence of a form of government more modern and more humane than any that had existed previously, so America itself would give rise to new ways of creating and perceiving art: "In art as in politics, in spite of our faults, the time-drift favors America" (ARI, 210). Williams argues that American sensibility, which is related by him to artistic sensibility, can express a view of knowledge that had hitherto only been recognized by artists, and a new relationship between the individual and the world around him.

CHAPTER 3

"WHAT EVERY ARTIST KNOWS": ART, KNOWLEDGE, AND AMERICA

> The proofs I am approaching are those of a wider knowledge than any one of the divisions of humanity, learned or unlearned, has power to envision--it has to do with time--and the test of time, with color, diverse forms, contact of the senses--with style, invention--the creations of genius and of animals and flowers. (EK, 44)

According to Williams, the American perspective on the nature of knowledge is, like the artist's perspective, based upon the recognition that truth is relative to time and place and that the search for a higher or absolute truth is futile. Williams himself carries this American, artistic perspective to the extreme that he questions the value of knowledge gained through science or philosophy, and he indicates that the most valuable and the most humane knowledge, if not the only knowledge, is gained through experience, contact with local conditions.[1] He distinguishes between the intelligent man, who gains knowledge through personal experience, and the intellectual, who gains knowledge through the accumulation of facts or by rationality alone. Williams criticizes intellectuals for being narrow idealists, "cut from the same cloth" as tyrants because they learn pre-conceived ideas about what should be--ideas that deny individual liberty and hinder perception of the actual world.[2] In Williams' opinion, intellectualism and idealism are part of the elitist European tradition, not the American: "The European medieval aspiration toward a peak, aristocratic striving: the American toward a useful body of knowledge made to serve the individual who is primary"

(EK, 9).[3]

Williams argues that artists, like Americans, gain knowledge through their own senses and perceptions (their own "body of knowledge") and that this "sensual contact" makes art the only human endeavor not restricted to any particular field of knowledge, such as science, philosophy, or mathematics, but concerned with all aspects of life. But this is to equate imagination and intelligence, for Williams indicates that the function of imagination is to perceive through the whole body, and he concludes that the artist is a man of intelligence. The analogy drawn by Williams between art and American ideology is accurate insofar as it applies to art based on actuality, but that is itself a thoroughly pragmatic, American view of art, for as Emerson points out in Nature, ". . . American character is marked by a more than average delight in accurate perception."[4] The absurd implication of Williams' argument is that the American attempt to view the world clearly, as though it is being seen for the first time, and the artist's attempt to do the same, have been justified by Einstein's theory of relativity,[5] so that in the twentieth century no one who does not adhere to the American ideology can be considered to be either an intelligent man or a great artist. But his argument itself is based upon the premise that there is a universal, modern perspective--a premise that contradicts both Williams' own argument for cultural relativity and the theory of relativity itself; time and place are inseparable, and the modern beliefs of one culture are not necessarily the beliefs of all cultures.

Although Einstein himself does not agree that his theory of relativity necessitates a change in man's attitude towards the world, he does recognize that such a change of attitude has occurred.[6] John

Unterecker expresses what has become known as the predominant modern attitude when he says that the theory of relativity "altogether changes the nature of knowledge."[7] And according to Giles Gunn, Einstein's theory gives modern man a perspective that defines his very modernity:

> . . . modern man knows--as the very terms of his identity as modern assume--that there is nothing real which does not change. Hence he is unable to conform himself to a model of the real which is fixed and timeless simply because he cannot believe that there is anything which is fixed, stable, and timeless.[8]

In fact, however, this so-called modern perspective is the perspective of the Romantics, though in the twentieth century it is given some scientific credence. Williams, therefore, by insisting upon what he believes to be the modern perspective, is carrying on the Romantic notion of the primacy of individual perception over any concept of universal truth.

Williams is not, of course, alone in his belief in this concept of the modern world, and this view of the modern loss of faith in universal truth is perhaps the basis of the Modernists' vision of the world in chaos. Lawrence Durrell argues that all artists of the twentieth century must understand that "There is no final truth to be found--there is only provisional truth within a given context."[9] Durrell explains that the causal or mechanical theory, which he calls "the bedrock of philosophy,"[10] and on which much of scientific thought before the twentieth century was based, came into doubt when scientists began to believe that ". . . the ultimate laws of nature were simply not causal at all":[11]

> If reality is somehow extra-causal, then a whole new vista of ideas is opened up--a territory hitherto only colonized by intuition. If the result of every experiment, of every motion of nature, is completely unforeseen and unpredictable--then everything is perpetually brand new, everything is, if you care to think of it like that, a miracle.[12]

Iris Murdoch, too, says that "We live in a scientific and anti-metaphysical age in which the dogmas, images, and precepts of religion have lost much of their power," and that "We are also the heirs of the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the Liberal tradition."[13] Even Durrell and Murdoch, then, who are not American, describe the modern world in terms of an ideological position that is part of the Romantic, liberal tradition of the age in which the United States itself was founded, and whose values have become part of the American ideology.

From this perspective, if every event is unique and knowledge of previous events is not necessarily transferrable to another situation, then intellect is considered to be much less important than it once had been, and knowledge cannot be measured on the basis of the accumulation of facts. In a system of measure that uses the accumulation of facts as a standard of knowledge, we might "all" agree, as Eliot says we do, that ". . . the knowledge of the European is superior to that of the savage."[14] But Williams does not believe that such a cultural hierarchy exists, nor does he believe in the development of the most important aspects of human knowledge--that which man finds in his own environment:

> The logical conclusion, or reductio ad absurdum--as it may be--is that when philosophy (or science) has solved the complexities of the ultimate constitution of matter--we shall somehow know more than the man who drew the white rhinoceros on the West Transvaal wall.
>
> It is unlikely. (EK, 82)

Williams' view is that, despite the accumulation of facts and despite new ways of applying these facts, man is no closer to an understanding of life or of reality than he has ever been:

> As far as any ultimate problem of the universe is concerned man on earth must forever be totally ignorant. For him all simply

> exists. He cannot know anything; he cannot even begin to know; he can merely appreciate; his sole possible activity can be but of two orders: to behold and to behold more. (EK, 178)

The effect of the theory of relativity on Williams' thought is that it justifies for him the American emphasis on individualism: if no one can come closer to an understanding of the universe than anyone else, then each man's view is as valid as another's. Higher authorities such as the monarchy, the Church, or the classics, authorities to which Eliot defers, are of the past, or of Europe, but not of America and the modern world. If intellect, in the sense of the accumulation of facts, is no longer a valid indicator of knowledge, then a new measure must take its place, and for Williams this measure is based on contact with immediate conditions, exemplified by Jefferson's system of government and Boone's move into the wilderness of America.

In this system, the individual becomes his own authority. In fact, Williams states explicitly that "The body it is which stands guard not only over our comings and goings, but over our wits also" (Nov, 364),[15] and that ideas can only be substantiated when they are based upon experience: "It is ridiculous for me to pronounce such ex cathedra statements except as results of observation from experience, whether as a poet or a physician . . ." (ARI, 111). Williams advises others, too, to conform to this limited approach to learning:

> Beware of psychologic supports to thought and action--these are a late development not yet certainly placed. First rely on the direct observation of the senses, of such strength everything else is built up, without it nothing is reliable. Judge by the eyes and ears, touch and taste--reject everything from no matter what source that is without a place there. (EK, 135)

Williams does, however, temper his rather dogmatic assertions of the direct relationship between knowledge and experience, and he comes closer to the distinctly American philosophy of pragmatism,[16] when he admits that accumulated facts can become more than "spurious information" if they stand the test of actual application:

> We see every advantage to a man in up-to-date information made his own through experience of its significance in his environment. This is knowledge. Spurious information is that which is unrelated to the contacts of experience. (CI, 3, 14)

Williams admits also that there are certain facts and theories that have become a part of human consciousness almost universally and he seems willing to overlook that they too are "psychologic supports": "It is important not to ignore the Copernican theory, the voyage of Columbus, not because these things make a damned bit of difference to anyone, especially to a poet, but because they stick unconscious in a man's crop and pervert his meaning unless he have them sufficiently at his fingers' tips to be ware [sic] of them."[17]

But even though Williams acknowledges the importance of some information, and he berates those Americans who "seldom read enough,"[18] he also emphasizes that for him all knowledge, even if it is not derived from experience, must be tested by experience. One connotation of the title, The Embodiment of Knowledge, is that a man's knowledge is embodied by him through experience. Because experience is ultimately of things, Williams stresses in "Paterson" (CEP, 233), in "A Sort of Song" (CIP, 7), in his autobiography (A, 390), and in the long poem, Paterson, that knowledge is based on contact with the things of the environment: "--Say it, no ideas but in things--" (P, 6). Only ideas based in a place and on the experience of that place can be understood by more than just the intellect, and Williams contends the knowledge "must be located outside the mind" (EK, 132) if it is to be valuable, or if it is to be knowledge at all: "The inundation of the intelligence by masses of complicated fact is not knowledge" (SA, 139).[19]

But even if the "full possession of our senses" will reveal to us "our position in the world" (ARI, 197), as Williams says it will, such emphasis on the individual, if it does not make the individual himself totally self-centred and egotistical, keeps him ignorant of cultures and attitudes that are outside his own experience. Nancy Willard says that Williams desires to bring about "the reconciliation of man with his world through the destruction of stereotyped modes of thinking and seeing which prevent him from knowing it,"[20] but his knowledge is limited to his own time and place. While Williams states that "Flexibility of thought is so precious that sometimes it seems the only virtue of the mind--the only virtue the mind needs" (EK, 126), and that "Doctrinaire formula-worship--that is our real enemy" (Nov, 279),[21] his own solution to the problem of maintaining flexibility, contact with the locality, is itself narrow and limited.

The basis of these limitations in Williams' view of knowledge, and of his American chauvinism, is in his analogy of political flexibility and flexibility of thought. The American democratic political system is Williams' archetype of a stable force that remains flexible and an order that constantly changes. Williams also views Jefferson's argument that ". . . a revolution every 20 years is the sole guarantee of a free state" (EK, 86),[22] as an indication of Jefferson's recognition that contact with the immediate conditions is more important than "subservience to the actual leaders" (R, 62). But Williams assumes that because contact with local conditions is the basis of American democratic ideology, which protects individual liberty, it is also what keeps the mind flexible:

> . . . the local in a full sense _is_ the freeing agency to all thought, in that it is everywhere accessible to all: not in the temple, of a class, but for every place where men have eyes, brains, vigor and the desire to partake with others of that same variant in other _places_ which unites us all--if we are able. (_EK_, 23)

Even though, within Williams' own system of determining knowledge, it is localism, not Americanism, that is the basis of intelligence, the relationship between Americanism and localism, built into the American political structure itself, leads Williams to the chauvinistic conclusion that the man who makes "intelligent use of his life" is a man who has "a liberal understanding of the world and an American one" (_EK_, 23).

Williams extends this analogy so that "American common sense,"[23] or "sensual contact," is related not only to intelligence and to American political ideology, but to art as well. For him, the "only world that exists is the world of the senses. The world of the artist" (_SE_, 196). The artist, like the quintessential Americans in Williams' interpretation of American history, connects his ideas to the actual world through contact: "It is in things that for the artist the power lies, not beyond them" (_SE_, 234). Williams limits all art to the expression of "sensual contact," because he tries to adapt art to his view of American ideology:

> For--as has been said many times--"all art is local," that it is is the effect of sensuality, the employment of sensual apperceptions by which to record and compose. And all sense must, to be accurate, apply itself to that which it sees, smells, touches--its locality. (_ARI_, 222)

While he could possibly make a convincing argument that twentieth-century American art, in order to express both the ideology and the place, must focus on the actual world, Williams imposes his theory on art and artists of the past, and he sets art in opposition to all other human endeavors instead of valuing it for its own worth.

Williams' rhetoric makes it seem as though by limiting art to this relationship with actuality, he is opening it up to possibilities that are far beyond the scope of such subjects as science, history, psychology, or philosophy, which are "so many fragments capable of infinite subdivisions." Williams' argument is that art, if it deals with life and experience, can present the "scope" of life itself (EK, 114): "In other words, art can be made of anything--provided it can be seen, smelt, touched, apprehended and understood to be what it is--the flesh of a constantly repeated permanence" (SL, 130). He argues that art, rooted in time and place while allowing for the treatment of any subject, is the only human endeavor flexible enough to encompass any field of knowledge. He believes that academics, thinking that they are disseminating knowledge, teach "remote historical examples and training in petty mechanical details" (R, 62), which are actually hindering the development of knowledge gained through experience: "But the chief effect of it all is to have allowed time to pass during our most impressionable years without coming into contact, actually, with what has happened and is happening around us" (EK, 64). Williams' solution is that before a student must "choose a field" (R, 35) or profession, he should be taught poetry, so that he can understand the choices available to him. Only art, and poetry in particular, can offer the student a view of the whole field of human endeavor:

> all subject to poetry--
>
> poetry is the standard of MEASURE: that gives them a worth
> (R, 36)

Although Williams understands that no one will ever know any more than "the man who drew the white rhinoceros on the West Transvaal wall," who is himself an artist, he also sees that art offers all of the knowledge that man has about life, which is a view of life itself in all its paradoxes and contradictions:

> It is knowledge that is the basis of art--that knows how to change and acknowledge the multiple-variability of its coin. Transcends time instead of layers of superimposed and oppressive values, gives an equal value, i.e., we know, or have known everything. (EK, 80)

But even while Williams is expounding the value of liberty, itself an abstract concept that he manipulates in order to disquise the restrictiveness of his own contact theory, he is also limiting art to the expression of experience:

> In only one thing have we grounds for belief: the multiple object of our life itself.
>
> When we are forced by a fact (a Boston, a Chicago even--provided we avoid sentimentality) it can save us from inanity, even though we do no more than photograph it.
>
> Eye to eye with some of the figures of our country and epoch, truthfully--avoiding science and philosophy--relying on our well-schooled senses, we can at least begin to pick up the essentials of a meaning. (CII, 1:2, 109)

Williams contends that "the philosopher writing about art" can never see what the artist sees because the artist's understanding is "part of his own body" and his art is "the product of a certain sort of living contact that can be made to live, even for discussion, in no other way" (ARI, 63). But while Williams makes this distinction between the knowledge of the philosopher and the knowledge of the artist, Eliot speaks of the "unification of sensibility," in which the poet's feelings and his mind are working together. Unlike Williams, who accepts "the multiple object of our life itself," Eliot believes it is the task of the mind to create order: "When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for its work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experience; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary."[24]

From Williams' perspective, only art that is the expression of experience can be an alternative to both intellectualism and "acquisitive understanding," while being at the same time a way to assess value:

> because I early recognized the futility of acquisitive understanding and at the same time rejected religious dogmatism. My whole life has been spent (so far) in seeking to place a value upon experience and the objects of experience that would satisfy my sense of inclusiveness without redundancy--completeness, lack of frustration with the liberty of choice; the things which the pursuit of "art" offers-- (SA, 115-16)

Williams makes the lack of rational process the primary virtue of art, believing that rationality interferes with the process of learning: "The only human value of anything, writing included, is intense vision of the facts, add to that by saying the truth and action upon them--clear into the machine of absurdity to a core that is covered" (DW, 259). He indicates that the way in which art reaches "a deeper reality lost to science completely: the American thing" (EK, 113), is by eliminating rationality from the creative process. Kenneth Burke defines Williams' view of the word "contact" as "man without the syllogism, without the parode, without Spinoza's Ethics, man with nothing but the thing and the feeling of that thing."[25]

But Williams not only rejects intellect as a part of his own artistic process, he also denies that it has ever been a part of the creative process of great artists. He asserts that Giotto "saw first, then he painted what he saw. He saw nothing the way they wanted him to see it" (ARI, 126). Williams creates the impression that Giotto's most creative act was in rebelling against whatever he had learned, in order to see for himself. Similarly, in "A Matisse!" published in the first version of Contact, Williams creates the impression that the success of Matisse's painting of a nude woman lies as much in what he does not do (take into consideration what he has learned about nudes from artists of the past) as in what he does, which is to paint the woman as he sees her, "in this spot today not like Diana or Aphrodite but with better proof than they of regard for the place she was in" (CI, 2, 7). Nearly thirty years later Williams reiterates his belief that "A man has to shut out almost all things believed to be woman today to paint woman" (ARI, 182).[26] He says it is "true of all studies" that the past, and abstract ideas received from the past, are "barriers" to "surmount," but that for "an art student," it is particularly necessary to ignore what has been learned: "But in art, which is the quintessence of knowledge, the category most responsive to living conditions, the most sensitive to the damages caused by lumber of all sorts, which ruin its accuracy, it [the past] is fatal" (EK, 10).

But even if Williams' assumptions about the creative processes of Giotto and Matisse are correct, his conclusion that art alone "measures, is accurate and devotes itself to the facts" (EK, 93) because it remains in contact with immediate conditions, is false. Williams, believing that it is this attachment to locality that gives art its "human element," ignores the aspect of poetry that is the expression of what Alfred North Whitehead calls "the intuitions of mankind."[27] Art can, without expressing sensory perceptions, bring alive in the imagination of its audience a world that is not necessarily an expression of the actual world; and at the same time in creating this imaginary world it can reveal the artist's intuitive understanding of conditions that exist in the actual world.

While the kind of art called for by the contact theory is not realism or representation of actuality (though in his argument Williams often seems to be restricting art to realism), he does not grant that the imagination of either the artist or his audience has the power of what might be called intuitive understanding, or understanding that is not based on sensory perception alone. For Williams, the artist's "vision," his imagination, is based quite literally upon his sensory perception. The ability to see things clearly is, for Williams, the greatest achievement of imagination. Imagination is not necessarily revealed in the largeness of the scope of artistic vision, but often in the artist's ability to distinguish subtleties. Williams himself states that he wants to "make a big, serious portrait of [his] time" (DW, 238), but he also states, ". . . unless I apply myself to the minute--my life escapes me" (Nov, 280). "Minute" here has the double meaning of the particular time and of the small, particular details of the environment. Through contact with the scene as it exists, cutting through all pre-conceived notions about that scene, the artist gains insight, or true understanding. But if intelligence and imagination are both seen as functions of the senses, they become indistinguishable.

In his prologue to Kora in Hell (1920), Williams praises his mother for "seeing the thing itself without forethought or afterthought but with great intensity of perception," and he views this intense perception as an act of "great imagination" (KH, 8). Later in the same book, Williams again relates the imagination to the bodily senses:

> That which is heard from the lips of those to whom we are talking in our day's-affairs mingles with what we see in the streets and everywhere about us as it mingles also with our imaginations. By this chemistry is fabricated a language of

> the day which shifts and reveals its meaning as clouds shift and turn in the sky and sometimes send down rain or snow or hail. This is the language to which few ears are tuned so that it is said by poets that few men are ever in their full senses because they have no way to use their imaginations. Thus to say that a man has no imagination is to say nearly that he is blind or deaf. (KH, 59)

The imagination, then, according to Williams, has nothing to do with abstractions, or with anything unrelated to things with which the senses can come in contact. Williams believes that the imagination is not divorced from the actual life of the artist, but is the highest fruition of that life:

> And if when I pompously announce that I am addressed--To the imagination--you believe that I thus divorce myself from life and so defeat my own end, I reply: To refine, to clarify, to intensify that eternal moment in which we alone live there is but a single force--the imagination. (SA, 89)

The insight or imagination that comprehends the environment is necessary before things can enter into the consciousness. The imagination must first discern the thing itself:

> The mind cannot have to do with that which lies beyond its sphere, therefore it behooves us to bring that which we wish to understand within the sphere of comprehension before we attempt to undo it. And thus before the mind goes always--and by necessity--the imagination. (EK, 49)

The artist's ability to see clearly, and to express that which he sees so that others might also see, becomes, for Williams, the essence of his usefulness to society, and the measure by which his art must be judged:

> But the thing that stands eternally in the way of really good writing is always one: the virtual impossibility of lifting to the imagination those things which lie under the direct scrutiny of the senses, close to the nose. It is this difficulty that sets a value upon all works of art and makes them a necessity. (KH, 14)

But Williams, contradicting his own argument that the expression of actual, physical contact with the locality has always been a necessary element of art, and an indication of the artist's knowledge, indicates that this contact is necessitated by modern developments in science, and by American democratic ideology. He implies that his time, the dominant ideas of his time, and his place are all factors that make contact a necessary part of the artistic process, but that the expression of actual events is not an inherent aspect of art. Contact becomes, therefore, not a necessary part of all artistic process, but a necessary part of artistic process in the twentieth century, and twentieth-century America particularly. Consequently, only modern art can be judged by its contact with the actual world, and the modern artist must be what Williams calls "a neo-realist," by expressing his own perceptions of the actual world:

> It is his business to show it to us, to convince our minds of its presence by painting it, placing it before us. It is the world of his imagination. It is the real world, the world that what _we_ call real occludes.
>
> The modern painter is a neo-realist, a painter of the real world, which with a gifted mind he deciphers through the murk. That is what the artist must be today--employing what painter's means he may. (_ARI_, 203)

But in a sense this attachment to locality in modern art is necessitated by the modern age itself, in which it is understood that place and time are inseparable.[28] Williams implies that artists have always understood the relationship of time and place, but with scientific evidence discovered in the twentieth century, the attachment to place has been intensified. Whereas in the past artists could reveal the attitudes and ideals of their age without direct reference to place because the age itself did not recognize the connection between place and time, in the twentieth century everything must be related "here, now, in our own environment, to ourselves and our day" (SE, 179)--this direct contact, according to Williams, characterizes the modern age itself:

> A course in mathematics would not be wasted on a poet, or a reader of poetry, if he remember no more from it than the geometric principle of the intersection of loci: from all angles lines converging and crossing establish points. He might carry it further and say in his imagination that apprehension perforates at places, through to understanding--as white is at the intersection of blue and green and yellow and red. It is this white light that is the background of all good work. Aware of this, one may read the Greeks or the Elizabethans or Sidney Lanier even Robert Bridges, and preserve interest, poise and enjoyment. He may visit Virginia or China, and when friends, eager to please, playfully lead him about for pockets of local color--he may go. Local color is not, as the parodist, the localists believe, an object of art. It is merely a variant serving to locate acme point of white penetration. The intensification of desire toward this purity is the modern variant. It is that which interests me most and seems most solid among the qualities I witness in my contemporaries; it is a quality present in much or even all that Miss Moore does. (SE, 122)

While Williams himself calls the modern painter a "neo-realist," his description of the kind of art called for by his theory indicates that what the modern artist presents is more complex than realism. The artist, as he "deciphers through the murk," does not simply create a realistic representation of that which he sees; instead, he penetrates into the thing and views it from all angles, and in doing so he is able to present a work that Williams says is "real, not 'realism' but reality itself" (SA, 117). The presentation of the thing, as in a Cubist painting, reveals the modern artist's desire to see all aspects of the thing simultaneously, and also reveals the intensity of the modern artist's perception in relation to artists of the past.[29]

But, in art of the past, a less intense contact between the artist and the actual things of his environment is indicative of the ideological position of the artist's culture--making art itself an expression of an ideological position, rather than an expression of physical contact, which Williams elsewhere claims that it is. Artists of the past, in expressing the ideological positions of their cultures, have depicted gods in their art. If, for the contemporary culture or for the individual artist, religion is part of daily life, then to forbid the expression of these values in art is to deny the value of that culture. Williams, ignoring his own insistence upon cultural relativity, argues that the modern age, because it demands contact with the actual world, has "enlarged the field of choice" for artists (Int, 21): "We don't have to take a conventional subject like Greek drama, which could speak only of the gods, or medieval painting, which was largely devoted to the Christian mythology. We can use anything, anything at all" (Int, 21).

Although Williams does not try to eliminate the possibility that abstractions or spiritual values can be expressed in art, he does insist that they must, in the modern world, be seen in actuality. In Kora in Hell, he demonstrates how the abstractions formerly represented symbolically by gods are now people before they are abstractions, not embodied abstractions.[30] In the twentieth century gods no longer exist in the heavens, and Williams believes that modern art must express this modernity by bringing the gods down to earth:

> Giants in the dirt. The gods, the Greek gods, smothered in filth and ignorance. The rare is scattered over the world. Where is its home? Find it if you've the genius. Here Hebe with a sick jaw and a cruel husband,--her mother left no place for a brain to grow. Herakles rowing boats on Berry's Creek! Zeus is a country doctor without a taste for coin jingling. Supper is of a bastard nectar on rare nights for they will come --the rare nights. The ground lifts and out sally the heroes of Sophokles, of AEschylus. (KH, 60)

Thus while Eliot, in "Ulysses, Order and Myth," argues that Joyce, in "using myth," is manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity" and is "pursuing a method which others must pursue after him," Williams alludes to mythology in Kora in Hell in order to reveal a distinction between the perspective of the past and the perspective of his own day. The use of myth is, for Eliot, "simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving shape and significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history."[31]

Therefore, while Eliot is concerned with giving "order" and "shape" to a world that is for him chaotic, Williams shows a more humane concern for men themselves. He believes that the gods of Greek literature merely represent abstract human concerns, which are still human concerns but which must not be viewed in an abstract setting that distances them from other men. Williams says that poetry should be "brought into the world where we live," and he also says, "To bring poetry out of the clouds and down to earth I still believe possible."[32] In modern literature, according to Williams, men are endowed with spirit, whereas in classical literature human spiritual qualities are given to gods; yet ultimately the artists express the same human concerns: "It's all of the gods, there's nothing else worth writing of. They are the same men they always were--but fallen" (KH, 61).

In The Descent of Winter (1928), Williams explains the distinction between the god or gods in literature before the twentieth century, whose secrets are beyond the comprehension of mankind, and the god of the modern world, who can be sensed in the actual world. Williams wants nothing to do with a god whose existence is dependent on faith alone because for him God is sensual contact with the actual world and the senses are the only means that man has to apprehend the world.

Williams does not want faith in an abstract god to blind individuals to the actual world:

> God--Sure if it means sense. "God" is poetic for the unobtainable. Sense is hard to get but it can be got. Certainly that destroys "God," it destroys everything that interferes with simple clarity of apprehension. (DW, 259)

In this sense, Williams is more concerned about the "field" as a place where forces are visible, than he is about abstract forces or gods that are invisible, and the true act of artistic imagination is to see, in things themselves, their own inherent uniqueness:

> To be an artist, as to be a good artisan, a man must know his materials. But in addition he must possess that really glandular perception of their uniqueness which realizes in them an end in itself, each piece irreplaceable by a substitute, not to be broken down to other meaning. Not to pull out, transubstantiate, boil, unglue, hammer, melt, digest and psychoanalyze, not even to distill but to see and keep what the understanding touches intact--as grapes are round and come in bunches. (SE, 233)

The kind of knowledge gained through this "glandular perception" is, in Williams' view, valuable in itself for the pleasure of the knowledge brought through contact and the experiences of life:

> THAT KNOWLEDGE IS ABSOLUTELY NOTHING--BUT PLEASURE
> An ENDLESS
> pursuit . DIANA , a chase,
> a love pursuit. It has an ENDLESS vista
> leads to NOTHING but
> the instant of its pleasure. (R, 32)

Williams accepts things by virtue of their very existence: "I pick this and that for what it is--take it and hold it, treasure it" (R, 48).

By relating his perspective to the perspective of all artists, and by attacking all knowledge that is not gained through what he considers to be the artistic approach, Williams obscures and belittles his most valuable achievement as a theorist, the suggestion of a new relationship between the artist and the world around him in which the artist subordinates his will to his environment, in order to understand the world before judging it. Williams himself recognizes, however, that the denial of intellect in favor of physical contact, whether or not such a denial is justifiable or possible, creates, theoretically at least, a sensibility that is manifested in the attempt to live in harmony with the environment: "Being forced back from any knowledge except the report of the senses, a humanistic naturalism is all that is left to me lit by the lightnings which play about the minds of saints and sinners."[33] Williams, therefore, attempts to immerse himself in the world and to allow the world to reveal itself to him.

CHAPTER 4

SELF AND OTHER: THE DENIAL OF WILL

> But the knowledge I have is in itself nothing; I must give it, I must love. I will, in fact, tell it against my very life itself, by which I make love greater than life, greater than knowledge. For it goes beyond life, where no knowledge goes and is the most daring of all the mysteries and the most wonderful, which is a sufficient pretext for the presence here of man. (EK, 185)

> The inevitable flux of the seeing eye toward measuring itself by the world it inhabits can only result in himself crushing humiliation unless the individual raise to some approximate co-extension with the universe. This is possible by aid of the imagination. Only through the agency of this force can a man feel himself moved largely with sympathetic impulses at work--(SA, 105)

In his emphasis on the artist's contact with his native environment, Williams distinguishes between "sensual contact," which implies sexuality and more specifically the physical expression of love, and mere physical contact of one entity with another. His statements regarding imagination would often seem to preclude the possibility of this more spiritual contact, or communion, which is revealed through "sensual contact," because frequently he does no more than associate the imagination with the senses. But knowledge is not as important, for Williams, as the sense of unity that is derived from understanding the perspective of other--that, human or otherwise, which exists outside one's own physical being.

Williams' view of knowledge--the view that knowledge is not only intellectual but is, more importantly, a part of the physical being

--raises questions regarding man's position in the world and man's relationship with man in society and politics. If intellect is not the measure of intelligence and does not indicate superiority in a Chain of Being, then man exists on an equal plane with all life, not only his fellow man. Williams' desire not to set himself above the world or distinct from it, but to be part of the world in which he exists, is an indication of his own concern for other. He does not wish to impose his view of the world upon the world itself, or to manipulate the world for his benefit--the denial of intellect becomes a denial of ego and the will to have power over other.[1]

Williams himself says that he "always had a feeling of identity with nature, but not assertive" (IWWP, 21), and this feeling is indicative of the breakdown of the subject/object relationship, so that the world reveals itself to the man who is in contact with it. This approach to the world and to other men Williams sees as the modern approach necessitated by Einstein's discoveries in physics, and the humane approach exemplified by St. Francis of Assisi; yet he also believes that Shakespeare displayed this sensibility and that it is a sensibility suited to the American ideology. Although such historical figures as De Soto and Boone do represent Williams' ideal of the self immersed in the world, the figure of St. Francis Einstein, in "St. Francis Einstein of the Daffodils," a poem published in the original Contact, is for Williams the image of contact both physical and spiritual--a true communion of self and other that indicates, as exemplified by Shakespeare, the finest artistic sensibility.

In Poets of Reality (1966), J. Hillis Miller explains that the persona's immersion in "the filthy Passaic" in "The Wanderer" signals "quietly and without fanfare, a revolution in human sensibility." As Miller points out, Williams' work is indicative of a relationship between self and other in which the distinction between "the inner world of the subject and the outer world of things" no longer exists.[2] In Paterson, Williams writes, "Be reconciled, poet, with your world, it is/ the only truth!" (P, 84). But Williams himself had felt such reconciliation of self and other since "The Wanderer," ("And I knew all--it became me" [P, 233]).[3]

Miller also indicates that Williams' "resignation to existence" (SL, 147) is a sacrifice of the self to the world, but Joseph Riddel states, justifiably, that "To begin by rejecting the dualism of subject and object is not to deny the self."[4] According to Riddel, contact "must begin with a sacrifice of ego, but only by way of finding one's self,"[5] and the relationship between the two is a dance, as in "The Dance":

> there are always two
>
> yourself and the other
> the point of your shoe setting the pace,
> if you break away and run
> the dance is over
> (PB, 32-33)

In this sense, then, Williams' view of the relationship of man and the world is distinct from the image presented by Emerson in Nature:

> Standing on the bare ground,--my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space,--all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God![6]

The image used by Emerson is of transcendence of the physical body by being "uplifted into infinite space" to become "part or parcel of God," but Williams believes that he must become part of the world in which he exists by remaining in contact with that world; yet for both Emerson and Williams the goal is the destruction of "all mean egotism."

Karl Malkoff, in Escape from the Self: A Study in Contemporary American Poetry and Poetics, says that the "ego's prerogative of ordering and interpreting experience" is no longer valid, and that "ego-based poetry and the New Criticism are very much like Newtonian physics encountering the Einsteinian universe."[7] If man is, as Durrell states he is, "simply a box labelled personality,"[8] then it is impossible for him not to give order, in his own mind, to the world that is outside himself. But Williams' desire to view the world "with sympathetic impulses at work" (SA, 105), is a denial of will or ego, and is an indication of his attempt to understand the world around him.

Eliot, like Durrell, in discussing the question of perspective, discounts the very possibility of knowing another perspective but one's own: ". . . since I can know no point of view, how can I know that there are other points of view, or admitting their existence, how can I take account of them?"[9] He gives no indication, as Williams does, that carnal knowledge is a communion of self and other, but instead intimates that the only way anyone can actually know another point of view is to be other than oneself by becoming the actual physical presence of another: "And we can say that we have no knowledge of other souls except through their bodies, because it is only thus that we can enter into their world."[10] Eliot implies, then, that even when he writes a dramatic monologue he is conscious of himself; he does not enter the consciousness of the persona in the same way that Williams believes Shakespeare becomes his characters, or in the way that Williams himself attempts to become a part of that with which he is in contact.[11]

The images employed most frequently by Williams to express this contact, in "The Wanderer," Kora in Hell, The Descent of Winter, Paterson, and several of his shorter poems, are descent and destruction, which are directly related. The descent is a destruction of ego because it is a loss of all knowledge or intellect, and it is also a destruction of intellectual knowledge itself, a denial of everything but the immediate contact. The artist succumbs to "a dark void coaxing him whither he has no knowledge" (KH, 45). This purge of the ego and the will that are the by-products of intellectual knowledge is essentially a descent into the body: "Man must give himself without complete knowledge in the world--or he will not give himself at all. That is to say he will know--in his body--nothing at all" (EK, 53). Williams says that he prefers "incessant new beginnings" to the stagnation that comes with an "ego-based" perspective, a "fixed point of view" in which "everything adjusts itself to that point of view" (KH, 15). For Williams, the way "To tear down, to destroy life's lies, to keep the senses bare . . ." is to ignore one's own past and the facts that are stored in the memory, and to focus on immediate conditions: "Having once taken the plunge the situation that preceded it becomes obsolete which a moment before was alive with malignant rigidities" (KH, 51).

This defeat of the will is, however, by no means permanent, though it is continual: "The poet goes up and down continually empty handed." Instead of being a defeat of the self, "destruction and creation/ are simultaneous" (SA, 127); in the act of succumbing to the unknown, ". . . we must SUCCEED even while we succumb" (SL, 316). And again Williams looks to American history to find examples of men who changed their lives drastically by entering into the American environment itself. He points specifically to General Sam Houston, who "left everything behind him" and, like Poe and Whitman, "took the descent once more, to the ground" (IAG, 213). Out of his despair about being rejected by his wife, Houston started a new life with the Indians. The defeat of one life became, for Houston, the beginning of another in which he "rose again" (IAG, 215). Yet, according to Williams, ". . . he who will grow from that basis must sink first" (IAG, 213): "Self-effacement, which is a despairing way, is the only way" (Int, 79). The descent, paradoxically, becomes an ascent: "Often when the descent seems well marked there will be a subtle ascent over-ruling it so that in the end when the degradation is fully anticipated the person will be found to have emerged upon a hilltop" (KH, 58). Williams says to "scrape away, scrape away: a mountain's buried in the dirt!" (KH, 53), and he believes that if he were to "Burrow, burrow, burrow! there's sky that way too if the pit's deep enough--so the stars tell us" (KH, 36).

This descent cannot be accomplished by anyone who believes that the accumulation of factual information will raise him from ignorance. Williams argues that training in the traditional methods and conventions of thought or literary technique is not as important to the artist as contact with, and surrender to, the cultural environment in which he lives, and that "the age should govern what you write" (Int, 79). Intellect, which instigates will and separates self from other, "always has to give way to the masses" (Int, 79), so that the cultural environment expresses itself through the writer, often revealing a logic and a harmony that the rational intellect may not have known to exist:

> A writer is a person whose best is released in the accomplishment of writing--perhaps it is a good variant to say--in the act of writing. He does not necessarily think these things--he does

> not, that is, think them out and then write them down: he writes and the best of him, in spite even of his thought, will appear on the page even to his surprise, unrecognized or even sometimes against his will, by proper use of words. (EK, 7)

As Sherman Paul indicates, the subject/object relationship is broken down because the perceiver and the thing perceived "both belong to the same perceptual space--the perceiver himself is part of the thing perceived--"[12] Therefore, it is necessary for Paterson to stay home, "Sniffing the trees,/ just another dog/ among a lot of dogs," while "The rest have run out--/ after the rabbits" (P, 3); it is necessary to stay at home in order to be a part of the scene depicted. In fact, only in the relationship with other can selfhood be gained: "an agony of self-realization/ bound into a whole/ by that which surrounds us" (PB, 109). But as Charles Doyle points out, Williams' view of the relationship between self and other is based on twentieth-century developments in science. Doyle, with reference to Alfred North Whitehead's view of "actuality as in essence a process,"[13] says: "For both Whitehead and Williams, man is simultaneously conscious of himself as himself and of himself as part of a process."[14] An individual is, therefore, simultaneously a unique personality and a part of a larger entity.

In 1952 Lawrence Durrell, apparently unaware of Williams' theory, published A Key to Modern British Poetry, in which he explains that twentieth-century developments in psychology and physics, primarily due to the work of Freud and Einstein, have fundamentally changed the way that man views the world--the nature of subject/object relations. Whereas science had, according to Durrell, "claimed an ABSOLUTE OBJECTIVITY in its judgments about the world,"[15] ". . . Einstein's theory joined up subject and object, in very much the same way as it joined up space and time."[16] The Principle of Indeterminacy reveals that ". . . we cannot observe the course of nature without disturbing it."[17] According to the relativity theory ". . . a precise knowledge of the outer world becomes an impossibility. This is because we and the outer world (subject and object) constitute a whole. If we are part of a unity we can no longer objectivize it successfully."[18] Therefore the relativity theory, as John Unterecker points out, poses new problems for the modern writer because it "involves a reorientation for the modern writer not only towards the materials of his art but also toward himself, his audience, his world."[19] Williams solves this problem by recognizing that he occupies "part of the field" (KH, 14) that he observes, and by recognizing the distinction between freedom, which is essentially egotistical, and liberty, which always considers the rights of others.

But Williams does not believe that he needs actually to be another in order to understand another's perspective; he need only be in contact with that other. This knowledge of other is attained through the body, in its sensual experience, as an entrance into the world of other, wherein self and other become one yet remain distinct. In Williams' imagery the contact between self and other takes on sexual connotations because there is a marriage of self and other through physical contact--experience--of which love is the most profound: "A piece of experience--of any kind--but especially of love is meat that enriches the whole body" (EK, 35). Love does not exist in abstractions, but in the physical world. Because love is a part of life it "must be definable in terms of sight and expression" (EK, 183). Love must be expressed in actual physical contact because ". . . here is the only place where we know the spirit to exist at all, befouled as it is by lies" (SE, 187). In Williams' imagery, the marriage of man and his world is consummated by sensual contact--a descent into and an entrance into that world, becoming a part of it.

In contact with that world, therefore, it is possible to be able to see the self by looking outward to other. In "Paterson," Williams asks, "Who are these people (how complex/ this mathematic) among whom I see myself?" (CEP, 234). This equation of self and other is complex, if not illogical according to the rationality of mathematics, but in the new world it is possible, just as in the work of art the artist must simultaneously be present and distant--he is a part of what he creates, while at the same time he remains "remote from the field" (SE, 277).

The key to Williams' entrance into the world of his subjects--into their homes and daily lives--is his medical practice; yet in his description of this contact with his patients, Williams is ambiguous about whose "self" he is allowed to enter:

> And my "medicine" was the thing which gained me entrance to these secret gardens of the self. It lay there, another world, in the self. I was permitted by my medical badge to follow the poor, defeated body into those gulfs and grottos. (A, 288)

The "body" takes him into "those gulfs and grottos," and that body seems to belong simultaneously to both Williams and his patients. He enters so deeply into their concerns and their consciousness that it feels to him as though he no longer exists:

> I lost myself in the very properties of their minds: for the moment at least I actually became them, whoever they should be, so that when I detached myself from them at the end of a half-hour of intense concentration over some illness which was affecting them, it was as though I were reawakening from a sleep. For the moment I myself did not exist, nothing of myself affected me. (A, 356)

So, in contact with what is outside his own being, even while the artist looks towards that with which he is in contact, he is "always and forever painting only one thing: a self-portrait" (ARI, 199), and while the artist gives expression to his world, that world speaks through him: "I insist that it is I, I, I, who PUTS the music into the throats of those in whom I HEAR my music."[20] The subject and the artist combine to produce a work of art, ". . . one putting up his actual face and the other his abilities, to produce this miraculous image" (ARI, 196), which is neither abstract nor representational.

In a sense, then, the artist and his subject are one, though they are not the same. While the artist "combines" with his subject, he does not actually change himself into other, nor does he remain totally objective--the work of art is the manifestation of the contact between artist and subject. According to Williams, once something is known not only in the mind but in the very "muscles," then ". . . the will is quit of it . . ." (KH, 74), and there is no need for man to manipulate that thing into a concept that is already understandable to him.

To deny the ego, therefore, is to enter into the world in which the individual finds himself, and to accept that world on its own terms. Dev, the protagonist of A Voyage to Pagany who Williams says is "of course, myself; his experiences, in a measure, mine" (IWWP, 45), says in "The Venus" that he finds "an attraction in all inanimate associations of [his] youth, shapes, foliage, trees to which [he is] used--and a love of place and the characteristics of place--good or bad, rich or poor" (Nov, 330). Williams admires those artists such as Charles Sheeler who do not deny their own environment or their own time, and who do not attempt to make them into something that they are not:

> Charles Sheeler has lived in a mechanical age. To deny that was to lose your life. That, the artist early recognized. In the world which immediately surrounded him it was more apparent than anywhere else on earth. What was he to do about it? He accepted it as the source of materials for his compositions. (ARI, 146)

Although Williams, like Sheeler, expresses the environment in which he lives, in Paterson and numerous short poems he offers overt value judgments. Paterson, particularly, contains criticisms about the lack of contact with the environment, and it is a condemnation of Alexander Hamilton and the policies that made the Passaic River region an industrial wasteland.[21] Yet Williams, not distinguishing between historical facts and value judgments, seems to be able to justify, to himself, his criticisms and the Social Credit solutions he proposes, because he considers that the problems he criticizes are caused by lack of contact with the environment, and that the Social Credit solutions are based upon an economic base in the locality. Ultimately, though, the contradiction of what Williams says in his theory, and what he does in his art, cannot be overlooked, and Williams' own political posturing is propagandistic and pedantic.

The value judgments made in Williams' short poems, however, especially "The Red Wheelbarrow" (CEP, 277) and "This is Just to Say" (CEP, 354), make what would otherwise be a mundane image and a common domestic situation provocative. The statements of opinion in the opening lines of these two poems raise questions about the justice of what is being said, and about the nature of the dependence that is revealed. The most clever, if not profound, aspect of these poems, however, is that very definite value judgments are made without any connection to a being behind those judgments. There is no personal pronoun, nor any indication of an identifiable speaker or persona; the judgments seem to be the revelations of an omniscient being, rather than personal opinions.

Theoretically, however, Williams would avoid statements of opinion in his poetry. He claims that the artist must express the world around him without taking a particular religious, political, or philosophical point of view:

> And a bad sign to me is always a religious or social tinge beginning to creep into a poet's work. You can put it down as a general rule that when a poet, in the broadest sense, begins to devote himself to the subject matter of his poems, genre, he has come to the end of his poetic means. (SE, 288)

Williams believes that ". . . poetry does not tamper with the world but moves it" (SA, 149). The artist reveals what is: "The objective of writing is, to reveal. It is not to teach, not to advertise, not to sell, not even to communicate (for that needs two) but to reveal, which needs not other than the man himself" (SE, 268). In revealing the thing itself, or the situation, the poet's task is not to judge, and therefore, without attempting to teach the reader anything about the subject, perform an act of revelation: "Write of things not in derogatory or laudatory criticism --but for what they are (as the nunnery) with respect to the perception I have of them: the general scheme: the actual theme" (EK, 90).

In a section of Rome in which Williams considers the possibility of a new magazine, the magazine which possibly became the second version of Contact, he states his position regarding magazines that have particular political leanings. Williams favors a magazine that would not advocate any particular social or political philosophy, but that would remain open to any revelation regarding the particular situation:

> A magazine whose political and literary policy would be to study and reveal what is--to oppose nothing advocate nothing but move with everything in motion,, condemning nothing, wishing to change nothing but muddle headedness--leaving everything behind
> Clarity is motion that is under way. (R, 58)

However, in dealing with the present, as Williams had said in Contact that the poet must, the poet cannot avoid the social or political concerns of his day. But these concerns appear in his work as a result of the experience presented, not as the reason for its presentation. Williams believes that poetry is not related to "socialism, communism or anything else that tries to swallow it," but rather with "reality, the actuality of everyday" (SL, 131).

Bram Dijkstra, in his introduction to A Recognizable Image, criticizes Williams for believing that a political element should not be a part of art:

> How an artist could express that world and yet not be part of it, not be influenced by the ideological structures which had shaped that world, even in his negative responses to it, is a question Williams chose to ignore in his rejection of the political dimension of art. (ARI, 22-23)

Dijkstra is wrong on two counts here: Williams does not deny that he had been influenced by American ideology; nor does he reject "the political dimension of art." Williams wants to approach political and social concerns by revealing the situation without offering a political solution to the problem. According to Williams, the artist must penetrate the images created by politicians and their public relations men, to reach the man himself:

> The confusion an aggressor would create to hide behind is like a movie screen on which appear his unfleshed desires, what he would like to have us believe and accept of him. But there is a littered and otherwise empty space back of it, which is

> himself, where he would not have us go. It is our effort to reach that place of reality which characterizes what we must do, a beam of light into it, to destroy him. (ARI, 170)

Williams does not contradict himself when he states that art has influence in society and politics, for if artists can convey their understanding, the world will be changed: "And in their work lies a depth of understanding which must ultimately do away with all tyrants and cruelty, all violence of which art is the antithesis" (ARI, 83).

What Williams calls for, then, is insight, not simply objectivity. The critical confusion regarding the relationship between contact and visual perception was perhaps started by Kenneth Burke's misinterpretation of Williams' method. Burke, in 1923, said that contact means "man with nothing but the thing and the feeling of that thing," but he also said, "The process is simply this: There is the eye, and there is the thing upon which the eye alights; while the relationship between the two is a poem."[22] Burke's comment about contact is, as Thomas Whitaker points out, "a misleading half-truth,"[23] and this half-truth has plagued study of Williams' theory almost since the theory's inception. Joseph Riddel clears up the problem, however, when he explains that Williams stresses "the primacy of contact as opposed to the secondary distancing of the 'eye.'"[24] Williams himself says that he fears "the too facile copying of the camera. It tends toward an empty realism";[25] yet the "ideologically determined delusion" of which Dijkstra speaks is perhaps not the belief in the possibility of "the unaltered perception of 'objective reality,'" but rather the belief that contact between the individual and the external world can be maintained and that it is possible to deny individual will in order to gain insight into the essence of other. On this issue of the self's relationship with the world Williams' position is, as J. Hillis

Miller indicates, illuminated by comparison with the positions of Pound and Eliot.

Miller says that Eliot's work reveals "a return to some form of monism," but that Eliot also recognizes "the inevitability of dualism."[26] It is evident in Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley that Eliot believes a distinction occurs between self and other only after experience. In his opinion immediate experience "is the starting point of our knowing, since it is only in immediate experience that knowledge and its object are one."[27] In this belief Eliot is in agreement with Williams, but unlike Williams Eliot does not focus on this immediacy. He states that ". . . no actual experience could be merely immediate, for if it were, we should certainly know nothing about it."[28] For Eliot, man would know nothing of the experience if it remained only immediate because, according to Eliot, knowledge is intellectual and events must be interpreted in order to be understood:

> Till you have 'the laws of their happening' how can you be said to have an event? An event, I should suppose, is a what--a that somehow interpreted, for you must single out some one aspect, you must occupy some point of view not internal to the event, before there can be anything of which there can be a law.[29]

After experience the distinction is made between self and other, and the experience becomes, for the individual, my experience of that event: "By the failure of any experience to be merely immediate, by its lack of harmony and cohesion, we find ourselves as conscious souls in a world of objects."[30]

Pound was perhaps grappling with the problem of trying to retain a sense of immediacy when he developed the concept of "Vorticism." He states that in a Vorticist poem ". . . one is trying to record the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective."[31] Pound's method, and often Eliot's method as well, is to adopt multiple personae, which Karl Malkoff says creates the effect of being neither subjective nor objective.[32] But as James Breslin points out, the choice of personae, and the attitudes adopted by these personae, reveal the distance between each persona and the world in which he lives:

> Pound's portrait of the modern artist in "Hugh Selwyn Mauberly" shows a lonely aesthete, thwarted by a vulgar and hostile society. When Eliot looks at the contemporary world in "The Waste Land," he does so from the lofty, ironic perspective of the seer Tiresias.[33]

Both Pound and Eliot, in the choice of personae, imply harsh judgment of the world, whereas Williams, like the persona of "The Wanderer," immerses himself in the world, not in an attempt to purge himself of it, but because he belongs to it. Williams never wants to alienate himself from his world:

> I have defeated myself purposely in almost everything I do because I don't want to be thought an _artist_. I much prefer to be an ordinary person. I never wanted to be separated from my fellow mortals by acting like an artist. I never wanted to be an artist externally--only secretly so as not to be set apart. I wanted to be something rare but not to have it separate me from the crowd. (_SL_, xvii)

Williams begins _Paterson_ by declaring that the perspective taken will be that of "just another dog/ among a lot of dogs" (_P_, 3), yet in reference to _Paterson_ Williams makes it clear that the perspective is his own even while it is that of Paterson, New Jersey: "I wanted to write it in a way which would be characteristic not only of the place but of me" (_Int_, 72). Williams' poetry is therefore not mimetic because he does not lose sight of his own individuality. Instead, because Williams writes "with sympathetic impulses at work" (SA, 105), while there is a distinction made between self and other there is also a bond of sympathy that brings subject and object together. Perhaps this bond of sympathy is best exemplified by "To a Dog Injured in the Street," which begins:

> It is myself,
>   not the poor beast lying there
>   yelping with pain
> that brings me to myself with a start--
>   as at the explosion
>   of a bomb, a bomb that has laid
> all the world waste.
>   I can do nothing
>   but sing about it
> and so I am assuaged
>   from my pain. (PB, 86)

The apparent reference of "it" in the opening line of the poem to the dog in the title makes the distinction between "it" and "myself" unclear--for an instant at least, the dog and the persona are one and the same in the reader's mind: "It is myself." But even though the dog's pain seems to become the persona's pain, "the poor beast" and "myself" are not the same physical entity; they are linked only by a bond of sympathy, through which the persona seems to suffer the same physical pain that the dog feels.

It is this sympathetic understanding of and feeling for others that Williams sees as the heritage given to the world by St. Francis of Assisi. According to Williams, St. Francis was able to teach and to learn simultaneously because he put himself on equal terms with all living things, and because he cared about others. In "The Mental Hospital Garden" St. Francis, "a kindly spirit,/ brother to the poor" (PB, 97), broods over the garden where patients are "divided/ from their fellows" by walls, yet live "by the Holy light of love" (PB, 98).

Although Williams does not directly state that he believes Americans have this saintly attitude towards others, he does express the opinion that St. Francis should be "the patron saint of the United States, because he loved the animals" and mingled with them "as an equal" (CI, 2, 11). But not only is St. Francis Williams' example of the ideal American approach to other, he is also Williams' example of the artist's approach to his subject and to his audience.

Williams believes that although St. Francis preached he did not try to impose his values on others or to convert them, he merely expressed his understanding of the word of God. This expression of an understanding without attempting to convert the audience is what Williams also sees as a primary function of art, and it is an indication of the artist's relationship with his audience:

> The only possible way that St. Francis could be on equal footing with the animals was through the word of God which he preached with fervent breath of understanding. Here was a common stem where all were one and from which every paired characteristic branched. It is the main body of art to which we must return again and again. Nor do I think it is especially recorded that St. Francis tried to make the Sparrows, Christians. When the service was over each beast returned to his former habits. (CI, 2, 12)

Art is, for Williams, another manifestation of the creative word of God and the spirit that wishes to create but not to convert: ". . . it is a common language we are seeking, a common language in which art itself is our St. Francis, we all meanwhile retaining our devotional character of Wolf, Sheep and Bear" (CI, 2, 12).

But St. Francis, and American ideology, do not only typify for Williams the artist's approach to his audience; they also typify what Williams sees as a uniquely American approach to the subject of the poem.

Williams believes that the American approach, unlike that of the Europeans, is to accept the inherent value of others and not try to force that other into one's own conception of the world. This attitude Williams views as the American "cultural discovery," which "will break the rubber neck of a french culture which, clamish [sic], reaches out to pull everything into its maw or finds it bad if it can't reach it" (R, 21). Again, it is the contrast between Boone's entrance into the new world and Alexander Hamilton's destruction of the Passaic with his Society for Useful Manufacturing (SUM), which makes Hamilton the arch-villain of Paterson. But historically there is some justification for the attitudes expressed by Williams, and this justification also reflects the spiritual nature of the communion that Williams seeks with his world.

Giles Gunn, in Interpretations of Otherness, states that "John Bettis has illumined this distinction nicely when he writes that if man's purpose in relation to things perceived as profane is to shape them according to his needs, man's purpose in relation to things perceived as sacred is to bring himself into conformity with them."[34] Williams, in praise of his world, attempts to bring himself into it.

The inability to see from the perspective of the other, in the social and political context, leads to elitism, tyranny, and oppression. In man's relationship with nature it means the destruction of nature itself. When man uses nature to promote his own materialistic goals, as Alexander Hamilton had done in Paterson, New Jersey, with his Society for Useful Manufacturing (SUM), he creates an industrial wasteland. In Paterson Williams views this wasteland as the product of a lack of communication, or contact, between man and man, and man and nature.

The importance of this attitude towards other, and the way that power is derived in American ideology, is evident when it is overlooked, as it is by Pound in *Jefferson and/or Mussolini*. Pound, like Williams, believes that decisions are important "*in a particular time and place*,"[35] and that "An *idée fixe* is a dead, set, stiff, varnished 'idea' existing in a vacuum."[36] Pound sees that in neither Jefferson nor Mussolini, each of whom he believes is a genius, is "preconception or theory strong enough to blind the leader to the immediate need."[37] He asserts that Jefferson, had he lived in Italy during the 1920s and 30s, would have proceeded in the same way as Mussolini, and that Mussolini, had he lived in America in the late eighteenth century, would have taken the same measures as those taken by Jefferson. Pound assumes that Jefferson's contention that "The best government is that which governs least" is not central to Jeffersonian principles in any age, and therefore Pound finds Mussolini's attempt to establish a strong government justifiable: "That is to say taking first the 'government' in our text and proceeding at reasonable pace toward the 'which governs least.'"[38] Pound makes a distinction between what he calls the "will to power" and "a very different passion, the will to order";[39] yet it seems that power over others is necessary in order to establish the kind of order Pound, and Mussolini, value. The power to establish order does not come from the people themselves.

Giles Gunn discusses William James' and Benjamin DeMott's judgment that Americans lack the ability to see other points of view:

> . . . our marked indifference to forms of existence other than our own, our habitual and pervasive intolerance of what is alien, in short, our characteristic inability through an act of imagination to get outside of our own skins, to put ourselves in the place of others, to understand that the only hope of escaping from the prison of self-regarding egotism, without falling directly into the tranquilizing embrace of mobocracy, is by learning how to imagine, acknowledge, and value what is distinctively individual and other.[40]

Gunn too recognizes that American ideology depends upon Americans' "capacity through imaginative vision to renew [their] saving contact with all that lies outside the perimeters of the self,"[41] and he quotes DeMott, who sees John Dewey as one of the few American thinkers to keep alive "a sense of the importance of individual differences, of the distinction between self and other."[42] Williams, like Dewey, realizes that in order to understand something other than one's own view, that other view must be seen and heard, and that an artist must make himself receptive to "otherness" by suppressing his own will and ego, although this sympathy and understanding does not encompass concepts or ideologies that entail group, co-operative effort.

The artist Williams sees as the best example of the ability to enter into the consciousness of those characters being presented is Shakespeare, whom he calls his "grandfather" (EK, 110). Williams' view of Shakespeare is important not so much in terms of Shakespearean criticism because his view is, at best, impossible to confirm or highly questionable, but because of the light it sheds on Williams' concern with the artist's approach to his subject. Williams conveniently ignores the liberties that Shakespeare takes with historical fact, the non-English settings and backgrounds of many plays, the magical and mythological qualities in some plays, and the metaphorical language, but focuses primarily on characterization.

Williams believes that Shakespeare does not think about what a character would say or do in a particular situation, but that he actually becomes that character; he could unconsciously "annihilate himself and be in the characters always the actual" (EK, 100).[43] This is not simply an entrance into the role of a character already created, it is also the way to create the character that will be acted. The character itself is created out of Shakespeare's contact with the mass of humanity. Williams believes that Shakespeare lives because he "sinks back into the mass" (DW, 258) and that his greatness comes from being of the people, not above them:

> Shakespeare had that mean ability to fuse himself with everyone which nobodies have, to be anything at any time, fluid, a nameless fellow whom nobody noticed--much, and that is what made him the great dramatist. Because he was nobody and was fluid and accessible. (DW, 253)

In Williams' opinion, Shakespeare "keeps alive by losing his life" (SE, 56), in that his own personality is not evident in his work.

Williams, in this view of Shakespeare, follows a line of thought that runs from Milton through the Romantics. This line, with only partial justification, views Shakespeare as a man of little education, and sees this lack of formal education as his chief virtue:

> Shakespeare is misunderstood if he is made a great figure, a bighead, a colossus of learning.--He is the effect of a kind of thing which has been unique in the world, a namelessness of unprecedented freedom, permeable and bulk--a dumbness as of a tree, river, sky, nation, peasant--recording almost mindlessly, greatness. (EK, 100)

More training in the classics would not have helped Shakespeare; it would have "gelded" him by making him a man of thought rather than a man of action: "He might easily have fallen into definition, whereas his chief fecundity derives from just the escape his lack of schooling offered" (EK, 140). Williams believes that Shakespeare's works are born out of instincts that are the opposite of scholarly work, for ". . . his writing is immediately related to an act, in contradistinction to the purveyances of scholards whose words are related to acts, if at all, only intermediately through thought" (EK, 12). His ignorance of science and philosophy "gave him a peculiar advantage" (EK, 15) because he was able to absorb his world "almost through his skin" (EK, 139).

Without the confinement of scholarly learning, Shakespeare was released "unprecedentedly to run over the whole field of observable fact without straying" (EK, 102). Shakespeare becomes, in Williams' mind, a great explorer of an unknown world, like Columbus, and a rebel against the tyranny of intellectualism. By bringing the characters alive, Shakespeare reveals truths about human nature that could never be found in scholarly historical texts: "He saw at first hand with the dignity of a discoverer" (EK, 140). Shakespeare, according to Williams, had the ability to reveal "the moods of natural phenomena" (EK, 15), to let things show themselves without the imposition of his own will upon them, and he was able to see from the perspective of one who is "part of the field," not above it or outside it. Williams asserts, without attempting to prove, that Shakespeare's knowledge came from "physical contact with the bare actualities of his difficult life" (EK, 16).

According to Williams, Shakespeare's sense of discovery, his reliance upon physical contact instead of formal education, and his ability to recognize "the moods of natural phenomena," give him the same "peculiar advantage" held by Americans in the twentieth century. Williams believes that Americans have been offered the same opportunity to break the boundaries of established beliefs as Shakespeare had been offered in Elizabethan England:

> He, Shakespeare, occupied in relation to his world the precise position America, as a nation, occupies toward the classical culture of Europe or the East today. We at our best (so far) are not scholars but we have wit, alert sensibilities. Our

> problem before the world is precisely his: shall we be accepted because of our species of "naturalism" or rejected because we do not meet the qualifications of scholarship? (EK, 39)

Shakespeare, then, according to Williams, is in contact with the world as it is, not as he would have it or as scholars would have him see it. In fact, Williams sees in Shakespeare a sympathy for the world as it is that allows him this perspective, which is to allow the world to present itself to him. This approach to the subject is encompassed in Richard E. Palmer's definition of phenomenology:

> . . . phenomenology means letting things become manifest as what they are, without forcing our own categories on them. It means a reversal of direction from that one is accustomed to: it is not we who point to things, rather, things show themselves to us. This is not to suggest some primitive animism but the recognition that the very essence of true understanding is that of being led by the power of the thing to manifest itself. . . . Phenomenology is a means of being led by the phenomenon through a way of access genuinely belonging to it.[44]

The artist, therefore, has to recognize what Williams calls the "deeper reality" of the thing itself, its intrinsic value, and he does not have to give it a value apart from what it is. Williams wishes to allow the object to present itself precisely, without the encumbrances of his ideas about it because he believes that ". . . reality needs no personal support but exists free from human action" (SA, 149-50).

Williams' approach to the world, his attempt to see things for their own unique qualities, is in direct contrast with the Modernists' desire to impose their own sense of order upon what is actually complex and diverse.[45] Charles Altieri, in reference to Roman Jacobson's work, differentiates between metaphoric and metonymic thought, and states that ". . . for Jacobson, the metaphoric function establishes relationships of similitude and brings divergent elements of experience into unified codes or systems of meaning" whereas metonymic thought is "based on contiguity rather than similitude."[46] The two modes of thought therefore have differing emphasis: the metaphoric emphasis on similarity, and the metonymic on the differences that make each thing unique and give it a value that is inherent. Jacobson's description of the metonymic mode of thought is the same as Williams' description of the poet's "power which discovers in things inimitable particles of dissimilarity which are the peculiar perfections of the thing in question" (KH, 18):

> The true value is that peculiarity which gives an object a character by itself. The associational or sentimental value is the false. Its imposition is due to lack of imagination, to an easy lateral sliding. The attention has been held too rigid on the one plane instead of following a more flexible, jagged resort. (KH, 14)

Part of the task of recognizing the value of the thing itself is in distinguishing it from all other things. For Williams, to see the thing itself is essentially a creative act:

> To discover and separate these things from the amorphous, the conglomerate normality with which they are surrounded and of which before the act of "creation" each is a part, calls for an eye to draw out that detail which is in itself the thing, to clinch our eyesight, that is, our understanding of it. (SE, 233)

Because each thing has its own inherent value, anything can be included in a work of art, and things, like individuals in a democratic society, are to be valued equally for their own individuality: ". . . it is idle to quarrel over the relative merits of one thing and another, oak leaves will not come on maples" (KH, 41). In works of art, all things are equal. To value one thing over another as the subject of a work is, in Williams' view, tantamount to prejudice and oppression. For Williams, no material is anti-poetic.

Frederick J. Hoffman explains that Williams' desire to recognize things for themselves and his statement, "No ideas but in things," are indicative of Williams' desire to begin the making of a poem by allowing things their own being apart from what he might want them to express in the poem itself:

> The essential for Williams is not to violate the integrity of these "things," since they are reality itself and need only to be encouraged to offer (in their _being_ objects) the most natural kind of commentary upon themselves. Ideas are, then, in things; there are no ideas _but_ in things. This does not mean that ideas to not belong in poetry; only that they do not _overtly_ belong there but should be developed from the particulars talking among themselves.[47]

Williams' approach to his world, then, is directly opposite to that approach expressed by Eliot's statement regarding the "objective correlative," in which the thing itself is not as important as its symbolic function:[48]

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that _particular_ emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[49]

To begin with the idea that a thing evokes a particular emotion or idea, as Eliot does, is to impose that emotion or idea upon the thing that is to convey it; it is to make the thing itself secondary to the idea that one has about it. Williams does not wish to impose associational values upon objects, and he believes that "the effect of a 'thing' surpasses all thought about it" (_SL_, 102).

The distinction, therefore, is between accepting things for themselves, and using things for one's own purposes. J. Hillis Miller explains that "the effacement of the ego before reality means abandoning the will to power over things," and that the relationship "is no longer that of the objective world opposed to the mind."[50] The attempt to see things for what they are affects the approach taken when presenting those things in a work of art, particularly in literature.

Contact is a way to proceed--a way to proceed in the making of the work of art, and a way to proceed in the perception and criticism of the work, but it is also a way of life--to gain insight into other. The way is to try to proceed not from preconceived notions about what that other should be, or should be like, but from the thing itself. Instead of beginning with the definition and applying the definition to the thing, begin with the thing and deduce from that. This is the humane approach, according to Williams, exemplified by St. Francis:

> Thus by reversing the current, putting the burden of proof upon the dynamic bodies of fact rather than the inhuman one of brutalizing the man by measuring him up to an accumulation of traditional ideas, there is opened a way to proceed which, if not reaching out like so many chiseled steps, is yet quite as logical as the usual process of scholars, but to reverse them, to turn them back whence they originally came to the man himself. Thus we can build upon the very obstacles which seem to block the way. (EK, 59-60)

For Williams, this contact approach has immense effect upon language, and upon form, because the artist attempts to identify his world by allowing that world to identify itself, through its own language and its own forms.

CHAPTER 5

THE WORD: LANGUAGE, ART, AND REALITY

> For everything we know and do is tied up with words, with the phrases words make, with the grammar which stultifies, the prose and poetical rhythms which bind us to our pet indolences and medievalisms. To Americans especially, those who no longer speak English, this is especially important. We need too often a burst of air in at the window of our prose. It is absolutely indispensable that we get this before we can even begin to think straight again. It's the words, the words we need to get back to, words washed clean. Until we get the power of thought back through a new minting of the words we are actually sunk. This is a moral question at base, surely but a technical one also and first. (SE, 163)

> Knowledge started with the "word," it might do far worse than to go back to the beginning--with the addition of the cleansing of the "word," which is the work poets have in hand. (EK, 6)

Williams understands clearly that language is an integral part of any culture,[1] and therefore he also sees the necessity of expressing a culture through its own language. But, more important, he tries to demonstrate that each place must have a language derived from it. Instead of admitting that, because America and England share similar languages, if not the same language, they share many cultural attributes, he tries to go back to the things of the American environment, to establish a clear relationship between words and the things to which they refer; he wants to make sure that English words have not been applied to American things that do not exist in England, but which are only similar to their English counterparts. Again Williams, justifiably, wants to identify what is unique in his own environment, and to clarify distinctions between similar things. Although the direct contact between words and things is an attempt to deny the connotative richness of a language that is centuries old, it has the advantage of making both the word and the thing more vivid--it gives them both an existence.

In Christian mythology, all existence begins with the word--"In the beginning was the word" (John 1:1, 14, 16) and according to Williams, the writer is the creator of a new world that exists simultaneously with the actual world, and which exists only because of the contact between words and the actual world;[2] the word expresses the world, and the world expresses itself through the word. The word is, as Alla Bozarth-Campbell points out, "the power that allows the sharing of world and that creates world as well,"[3] and according to Gerald Bruns it "calls the world into what Heidegger terms the unconcealment of being."[4] Williams argues that literary arts must express the actual world not only because the artist has a moral obligation to his own culture, but because the word and the world are mutually dependent--neither exists without the other. The word expressed by the poet reveals the actual world and simultaneously the world created by the poet embodies the actual things that exist in time and space. Williams believes that without this contact the artist's creation is mere illusion and the actual world cannot be called into "the unconcealment of being"; Americans must, therefore, "create their own imaginative world" through "art, which is their word of God" (CI, 2, 12). The technical problem confronting the poet is to cleanse the word of connotations not added in the place where the word is spoken as part of everyday language, and thereby to maintain "the essential contact between words and the locality that breeds them, in this case America" (CI, 1, 10). Without this contact, connotations pervert the meanings of words "until their effect on the mind is no longer what it was when they were fresh . . ." (SE, 89-90), and the place itself is not clearly identified.

Williams' desire to clarify distinctions between the American environment and the English environment is praiseworthy. The problem of language has always been acute in America, as in other places that have been colonized, because language has been imposed upon, rather than derived from, place. Although it cannot be said that any language is derived strictly from the environment (as the English language is not derived strictly from England), the lack of contact between the word and the place in which it is spoken distorts not only the word, but the unique value of the thing to which the word refers as well. While pointing out "the myth of a primordial sign, which is to say the myth of an ideal unity of word and being," Gerald Bruns acknowledges that words without referents, if they exist at all, exist only in a vacuum.[5] The need to sort out and distinguish what aspects of the English language are usable and adaptable to America makes necessary the process of distinguishing between things of the American and English environments.

Williams' view of the poet as clarifier of the actual world and cleanser of language does again, however, place strict limitations on the poet--both in his subject and his use of language. But as long as the goals set for the poet are personal goals (and unfortunately Williams tries to make them American goals and modern goals), they can provide a way in which the poet can be of service to his culture because, as Williams explains, man does not understand things fully until he identifies them:

> Understood in a practical way, without calling upon mystic agencies, of this or that order, it is that life becomes actual only when it is identified with ourselves. When we name it, life exists. To repeat physical experiences has no--

> The only means he has to give value to life is to recognize it with the imagination and name it; this is so. To repeat and repeat the thing without naming it is only to dull the sense and results in frustration. (SA, 115)

Eliot, in Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley, explains the significance of the word in human understanding in terms very similar to those expressed by Williams:

> Without words, no objects. The object, purely experienced and not denominated, is not yet an object, because it is only a bundle of particular perceptions; in order to be an object it must present identity in difference throughout a span of time. Now of course I do not pretend that there are no objects for the higher animals, or even for the lower; the difference is in one aspect only of degree. But we may say that in any knowledge prior to speech the object is not so much an identity recognized as such as it is a similar way of acting; the identity is rather lived out than known. What we are concerned with is the explicit recognition of an object as such, and I do not believe that this occurs without the beginnings of speech.[6]

The writer, as both Williams and Eliot are aware, is involved in the creation of the world that is known by man because he expresses the world in words and, as Williams says, "Words are the keys that unlock the mind" (SE, 282).[7]

This question of the relationship between the word and the thing was dealt with extensively in the nineteenth century, and in American Renaissance F. O. Matthiessen presents a valuable overview of the attitudes of that time. Matthiessen says that Emerson would have agreed with Wordsworth that

> . . . when the poet is receptive to the divine effluence, his mind is endowed directly with the word that embodies the thing. Carlyle also enunciated this phase of the doctrine: "Poetic creation, what is this but *seeing* the thing sufficiently? The *word* that will describe, follows of itself from such clear intense sight of the thing."[8]

Matthiessen also states that "The epitome of Emerson's belief is that 'in good writing, words become one with things,'"[9] and that ". . . Emerson followed Coleridge to the heart of his conception of the act of knowing. Coleridge held that 'the truth is universally placed in the coincidence of the thought with the thing, of the representation with the thing represented.'"[10]

Emerson's desire to have the artist "pierce this rotten diction and fasten words again to visible things"[11] does seem particularly relevant in America, where the English language had been imposed upon a non-English environment, and where American scholars often fought to maintain the English language against a language that had begun to develop in America. Thoreau, in a journal entry from 1859, is adamant in his belief in an American language:

> Talk about learning our letters and being literate! Why, the roots of letters are things. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings, and yet American scholars, having little or no root in the soil, commonly strive with all their might to confine themselves to the imported symbols alone. All the true growth and experience, the living speech, they would fain reject as "Americanisms."[12]

But perhaps the most important statement regarding language comes from Coleridge, who says, "I would endeavor to destroy the old antithesis of Words and Things: elevating, as it were Words into Things and living things too."[13] Although Williams does not acknowledge Coleridge's contribution to language theory, he does believe that the predominance of this belief in the "tactile qualities" of words distinguishes twentieth-century writing from literature of earlier ages. Williams' belief in the word as thing again distinguishes his views from those of Eliot, and from writers who view words only as symbols.

Eliot speaks of the "mystic marriage of word and object,"[14] and he indicates that the word is more than a symbolic representation of the thing: "No symbol, I maintain, is ever a mere symbol, but is continuous with what it symbolizes."[15] Yet he states also that ". . . the name is not the object, certainly."[16] For Williams, however, although the word may not actually be the thing it represents, in literature contact between the word and the thing imbues the word with an identity of its own--an identity directly dependent upon the contact between word and thing. In the understanding of men, therefore, art and the actual world become mutually dependent upon one another, and the world of art is as real as the actual world, not a mere reflection of it.

In "The Wanderer," before the persona is immersed in the river he asks, "How shall I be a mirror to this modernity?" (CEP, 3). "The Wanderer" itself does not indicate whether this immersion allows the artist/persona to reflect a mirror image of the modern world, or whether he learns that art can be more than a reflection of the actual world, but Williams himself understands that art "is not, at its best, the mirror--which is far too ready a symbol. It is the life--but transmuted into another tighter form" (SE, 198). When the artist creates a world in his art his task is, as Williams states emphatically in "The Desert Music," "to imitate, not to copy nature, not/ to copy nature" (PB, 109);[17] he does not reflect nature, but makes a world that exists parallel to nature. According to Williams, this can be accomplished only if the poet recognizes the "tactile qualities of the words, without which there is nothing."[18] Only by naming the world does the world become real, and only through contact with the world do works of art become "real, not 'realism' but reality itself" (SA, 117).

J. Hillis Miller, focusing on the prose passages of Spring and

All, says that these passages are Williams' "fullest expression of a subtle theory of poetry which rejects both the mirror and the lamp, both the classical theory of art as imitation and the romantic theory of art as transformation."[19] But Williams himself credits Gertrude Stein with the recognition that words are objects in themselves, and he states that ". . . Miss Stein's emphasis on the word as an object was one of her most important contributions to contemporary art."[20] He also gives James Joyce and Ezra Pound credit for aiding in "the principal move in imaginative writing today--that away from the word as symbol toward the word as reality" (SE, 107), a move which he sees as "the genius of a generation, the concept of words as things. The Word, in short."[21]

The concept of words as things is the theoretical or aesthetic basis of what was also a publishing venture established by Williams in 1930, along with George Oppen, Charles Reznikoff, and Louis Zukofsky. The term "Objectivist," which became the name of this group, is somewhat misleading because, for Williams at least, Objectivism is not a perspective but rather an insistence on the "Reality of the word" (EK, 142), the word as object. Williams asks, "But can you not see, can you not taste, can you not smell, can you not hear, can you not touch--words? (GAN, 159), and through the narrator/novelist of The Great American Novel (1923), he self-mockingly praises his own ability to make words "be leaves, trees, the corners of his house" (GAN, 166). Williams demonstrates, in his poetry, the power of words as they act on the consciousness of the reader.

In "Romance Moderne" Williams describes a car moving along a highway, passing trees as it goes. But the trees appear and disappear to the reader of the poem, in his imagination, as they appear and reappear to the passengers in the car:

> Trees vanish--reappear--vanish:
> detached dance of gnomes--as a talk
> dodging remarks, glows and fades.
> --The unseen power of words--
> (*CEP*, 181)

Similarly, in "The Desert Music," Williams creates the impression that the reader is present in the streets of Juarez, and that he is, like Williams himself, being guided toward the market:

> The Old Market's a good place to begin:
> Let's cut through here--
> tequila's only
> a nickel a slug in these side streets.
> (*PB*, 111)

Williams believes that words themselves, in art, can be perceived and experienced by the reader and the writer, and that as the writer's materials, words are "shapes perceptible to the senses" and "not corollaries only of the brain" (*EK*, 128).

The distinction between the use of language in science and philosophy and the use of language by the poet is, according to Williams, in the way that words themselves are perceived. It is the poet's task to *make* words real by keeping the direct contact between the word and the actual world. The artist "does not translate the sensuality of his materials into symbols but deals with them directly. By this he belongs to his world and time, sensually, realistically" (*SE*, 197). In art, ". . . language itself is primary and ideas subservient to language," apart from what it may represent or be a sign for, whereas in science or philosophy, "the gross use of language," words remain "secondary to the burden of ideas--information, what not" (*EK*, 141). Williams makes a distinction between the language of letters and what might be called prosaic language, and he believes that by taking words out of their prosaic context artists accentuate the word itself, rather than making the word "a symbol without reality of its own" (EK, 147).

But, because Williams sees words as things, "those small bricks with which we would build the arts--poems in our own category as writers,"[22] he draws a false analogy between painting and literature, believing that words, like paint, are material entities:

> It is the making of that step, to come over to the tactile qualities, the words themselves beyond the mere thought expressed that distinguishes the modern, or distinguished the modern of that time from the period before the turn of the century. And it is the reason why painting and the poem became so closely allied at that time. It was the work of painters following Cézanne and the Impressionists that, critically, opened up the age of Stein, Joyce and a good many others. It is in the taking of that step over from feeling to the imaginative object, on the cloth, on the page, that defined the term, the modern term--a work of art, what it meant to them. (A, 380-81)

Words can act, in our imaginations, like that which they represent, but to say, as Williams does, that "Writing is made up of words, of nothing else" (SE, 132), is to ignore the very referents upon which the existence of the words is based; to make a distinction between the word as thing and the word as idea does not change the basis of the existence of that word--the thing to which it refers. Words, unlike paint, cannot actually be non-representational.

Williams, in an effort to reveal the tactile qualities of the artist's materials, tells an anecdote about a woman who asks an art dealer about a particular section of a painting:

> "What is all this down here in this corner?" she said pointing to a part of the picture.
>
> Hartepence leaned over, inspected the area carefully, and after a little consideration stood back and said to the woman: "That, Madam, I should say, is paint."[23]

But this anecdote also illustrates the distinction between literary arts and other art forms, which is that words, the very material of literature, always present something beyond themselves--if they did not, they would not express "local color," which Williams himself says is a consequence of the writer's contact with his locality. Writers may have learned about the "tactile qualities" of their materials from painters, as Williams states they did, but literature, because it is made of words and words always relate to things beyond themselves, cannot be totally abstract in the way that painting can be. Paintings are able to relate to nothing beyond themselves--paint on canvas--but, as Louis Zukofsky points out, words must have a context "based on a world,"[24] in contact with an external reference:

> Impossible to communicate anything but particulars--historic and contemporary--things, human beings as things their instrumentalities of capillaries and veins binding up and bound up with events and contingencies. The revolutionary word if it must revolve cannot escape having a reference. It is not infinite. Even the infinite is a term.[25]

This does not mean, however, that the effect of words upon the imagination is less powerful than the effect of actuality itself--the word, although it cannot actually be the thing itself, can have, in the imagination, as strong an effect as the thing it represents. Through the contact between word and thing, the representational or referential aspect of the word, the word gains its own power to create a sense of the thing:

> The words are freed to be understood again in an original, a fresh, a delightful sense.
> Lucid they become. Plain, as they have not been for a lifetime, we see them. (SE, 90)

According to Williams, only when a word has a clear referent can it be "put down for itself, not as a symbol of nature but a part, cognizant of the whole--aware--civilized" (SA, 102). He believes that the modern writer must be like Shakespeare who, according to Williams, could "invent reality in the words which stemmed back directly to things, to the ground, to his own simplicity, directness, and after all emptiness" (EK, 16).

Although words need to be symbols for other things before they can be things themselves, Williams believes that their symbolic function must not extend beyond the facts to which they refer. Louis Zukofsky perhaps expresses the reasons why poets must use words sparingly when he says: "The economy of presentation in writing is a reassertion of the faith that the combined letters--the words--are absolute symbols for objects, states, acts, interrelations, thoughts about them. If not, why use words--new or old?"[26]

Confusion can arise, however, when the fact itself takes on a symbolic function, as Williams points out: "For I could live forever in a hut in a valley and if I were born there I would mistake the valley for peace, the hut for comfort, my dog for love, one flower for beauty and myself for king of creation just as has been done many times in the past" (EK, 182). But the word itself (valley, hut, dog, flower) must refer only to the thing, even though the thing itself may have come to have connotations beyond its intrinsic nature, as ". . . gold, that is to say 'gold,' by confusion has come to be taken as identical with money in some languages" (SE, 244). The value placed on the object can mistakenly become more important than the object itself, so that "The truth of the object is somehow hazed over, dulled" (DW, 247). Williams believes that the rose, for example, has become "obsolete" (SA, 107) because it has long been associated with love: "The rose carried the weight of love/ but love is at an end--of roses" (SA, 108). The word "rose" must therefore not be used by poets to mean love, and if the word itself is used to identify its direct referent, then that referent, the rose itself, will be seen more clearly:

> Sooner or later
> we must come to the end
> of striving
>
> to re-establish
> the image the image of
> the rose
> (PB, 70)

According to Williams, poets face the task of continually renewing the language by refusing to use words, and therefore things themselves, as symbols--in other words, by seeing the thing itself clearly and by using words only as symbols of those things to which they refer directly. Williams seeks to dissociate American conditions from conditions elsewhere which might be similar enough to America to cause confusion but which are not the same. He believes that the only way to differentiate between similar things is to identify the new. Joseph Riddel states that it is this "freedom of inaugural naming which the post-Modern writer seeks,"[27] and he sees this as a distinction between Modernism and post-Modernism. The post-Modernist, according to Riddel, attempts to clarify distinctions between things, not by comparing them, but by revealing the things themselves. But the language spoken by things themselves was perhaps understood by Thoreau long before Modernism or post-Modernism. Thoreau states:

> But while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard.[28]

Because he wishes to reveal the direct relationship between words and things, and to reveal the unique, intrinsic value of the things themselves and their "dissimilarity to all other things," Williams argues that ". . . the coining of similes is a pastime of a very low order, depending as it does upon a nearly vegetable coincidence" (KH, 18). Williams' dictum that the artist "must keep his eye without fault upon those things he values, to which officials constantly refuse to give the proper names" (SE, 231), is reinforced by Louis Zukofsky's explanation that the relationship of one thing to another does not necessarily enhance the perception of either thing any more than what could be seen and revealed with a single word, if that word is in direct contact with the thing itself:

> The disadvantage of strained metaphor is not that it is necessarily sentimental (the sentimental may at times have its positive personal qualities) but that it carries the mind to a diffuse everywhere and leaves it nowhere. One is brought back to the entirety of the single word which is in itself a relation, an implied metaphor, an arrangement, a harmony or a dissonance.[29]

Williams himself recognizes that to refrain from using the devices of symbol and metaphor constitutes a radical change in the nature of poetry. But he makes "vividness," the presentation of the word itself, his own goal and the goal of modern poetry:

> poetry should strive for nothing else, this vividness alone, per se, for itself. The realization of this has its own internal fire that is "like" nothing. Therefore the bastardy of the simile. That thing, the vividness which is poetry by itself, makes the poem. There is no need to explain or compare. Make it and it is a poem. This is modern, not the saga. There are no sagas--only trees now, animals, engines: There's that. (DW, 247-48)

In attempting this task, if it is valuable at all and not simply limiting the boundaries of poetry, Williams is attempting the impossible--to return to the mythical unity of word and thing in which things have no symbolic or associational value, when things are recognizable for themselves, and when they are seen for the first time as when Adam first saw them; but nevertheless a task made necessary by the existence of the new world itself, and by a world that is forever new.

Williams' primary example of a poet who is able to see the nature of the thing itself is Marianne Moore. Williams believes that Marianne Moore sees the objects in her poems as objects themselves _first_, before those objects can be related to anything beyond themselves:

> To Miss Moore an apple remains an apple whether it be in Eden or in the fruit bowl where it curls. But that would be hard to prove--
> "dazzled by the apple." (_SE_, 125)

Kenneth Burke concurs with Williams' view of the objects in Marianne Moore's poems, and referring to the four clocks in Miss Moore's "Four Quartz Crystal Clocks" Burke states: "We read of four, not because the number corresponds, for instance, to the Horsemen of the Apocalypse, but simply because there actually are four of them in the time vault."[30]

Similarly, Williams says that his choice of the figure five on the fire truck in "The Great Figure," or his choice of the fire truck itself, is for no other purpose than that they presented themselves to him--he came in contact with them: "The impression was so sudden and forceful that I took a piece of paper out of my pocket and wrote a short poem about it" (_A_, 172). Thus, whatever symbolic value the objects in the poem might have comes _after_ the sensory contact with the thing, unlike Eliot's "objective correlative"; and Williams and Marianne Moore have, as Kenneth Burke says they have, "an important quality common to their modes of perception," which Burke calls the "Objectivist" perspective.[31]

Williams himself does not take into account the reader's role in determining the symbolic function of language when he argues that, in a poem by Marianne Moore, an apple, even if it were surrounded by "the coil of a snake," would not be symbolic. He feels that Marianne Moore's "scheme of composition," which is to allow for "the hard and unaffected concept of the apple itself as an idea," defies the reader's attempts to make "connectives" between the apple and anything else (SE, 127); the lack of metaphoric "connectives" in the poem itself allows the reader to pass swiftly "without repugnance from thing to thing" (SE, 124). This is, as Williams himself says, "hard to prove," but what is more important here than Williams' critical assessment is the revelation of his attitude that figurative language should not detract from the word itself.

The clarity of the presentation of the kitchen scene in "Good Night," from Al Que Quiere! is typical of the vivid presentation of things in Williams' own poetry, but it is also indicative of the limitations of such a method, particularly in a poetic output as massive as Williams':

> In brilliant gas light
> I turn the kitchen spigot
> and watch the water splash
> into the clean white sink.
> On the grooved drain-board
> to one side is
> a glass filled with parsley--
> crisped green. (CEP, 145)

Williams' ability to place the reader into the scene by appealing not only to the visual aspects of that scene but to all of his senses demonstrates how well language can create, in the imagination, a world that is based upon the direct relationship of words and actual things; yet even Williams could not deny totally the value of figurative language, and as Linda Wagner points out, he used "figurative language, especially metaphor"[32] throughout his career.

Critics such as Bram Dijkstra, as well as Linda Wagner, view Williams' use of figurative language, and particularly his choice of the city of Paterson, with its location at the falls, its history as an industrial centre, and its very name, pater/son, as "the trap which throughout his career as a poet he attempted to but could never entirely manage to avoid: the use of comparison, of metaphor."[33] However, as David Lodge explains, the distinction between the poetry of metaphor and the poetry of metonymy is not

> . . . between two mutually exclusive types of discourse, but a distinction based on dominance. The metaphoric work cannot totally neglect metonymic continuity if it is to be intelligible at all. Correspondingly, the metonymic text cannot eliminate all signs that it is available for metaphorical interpretation.[34]

As J. Hillis Miller points out, Williams uses few metaphors and very little figurative language.[35]

But, perhaps more important, Paterson is not a simple case of one thing being compared directly to another; Edwin J. Fussell explains that it is "the best instance in American poetry of a major poem built on constituting metaphor that is at the same time constitutionally open-ended."[36] Paterson does not represent one thing, but many and various things at different points in the poem. The value of the metaphor changes because Paterson itself changes, and within the poem the reader encounters particular incidents concerning the city--the city is a living, changing entity, not an idea about a city or a mythological city. The place, Paterson, actually exists, and it is a city before it becomes a metaphor.

Also, the things that take on symbolic significance in Williams' poems are common to the American locale, but they are viewed in an uncommon way. In "Asphodel, That Greeny Flower," the asphodel becomes a symbol of love, but it reveals the particular love shared by Williams and his wife. The asphodel does not have a traditional association with the concept of love, and Williams' use of this particular flower as a symbol forces the reader to see both the asphodel and Williams' love for Flossie as unique entities. As Alan Ostrom says, even when Williams uses literary allusions or echoes other poets, he "always tries to make them of secondary importance, using them for the most part in such a fashion that they have intrinsic values as parts of the poem even for the reader who does not know their literary significance . . . ."[37]

For Williams, then, even metaphors and symbols must reveal uniqueness, because his chief concern is to identify those things that exist in his own environment. He is unable to identify those things, however, when the language itself is inadequate--when it is unable to express the environment because it is not derived from that environment. The poet must, therefore, name things while those things simultaneously reveal their identity to the poet. Williams believes that a language not derived from the place in which it is used causes confusion, and in the foreword to In the American Grain he states that his purpose is "to re-name the things seen, now lost in chaos of borrowed titles, many of them inappropriate, under which the true character lies hid." His method of re-naming or re-identifying those historical figures with whom he deals in In The American Grain is "to draw from every source one thing, the strange phosphorous of the life, nameless under an old misappellation." In the book itself, Williams allows the men to identify themselves through their own words--Williams, of course, decides which of the historical figure's words reveal "the strange phosphorous of the life," which perhaps might be what is termed, in Paterson, the "radiant gist," but the words used by Williams to identify the men are, for the most part, the words of the men themselves, so that the men are alive and immediate through their words.

The poet's task of identifying parallels the task of politicians or freedom fighters who work towards goals that can never be reached yet must be sought. Archibald Macleish mocks the "loving homage paid to these imaginary words which are described as 'hard' and 'clean'--both adjectives, you will notice, being metaphors with rich and shadowy implications about their shoulders."[38] But these adjectives are metaphorical only if words are not things themselves and, perhaps more importantly, Macleish has overlooked the necessity of the task accomplished when words can be made "hard" and "clean." Williams says that ". . . every term must be forged new" (DW, 259), which is not necessarily to make a new, different word but at least to renew the contact between words and the things of the cultural environment.

In his "Manifesto" for a short-lived magazine called Pagany, which Williams edited with Richard Johns, Williams reiterates his belief in the contact between word and place, and in the necessity of maintaining a direct link between the language of the time and place and the literature produced there. The word must retain its immediate contact or all thought becomes confused:

> To what shall the mind turn for that with which to rehabilitate our thought and our lives? To the word, a meaning hardly distinguishable from that of place, in whose great, virtuous and at present little realized potency we hereby manifest our belief.[39]

Because the word must have a referent in the actual world, and that referent must be known by means of sensual contact, then, as Dev, the protagonist of A Voyage to Pagany, exclaims, "The place of my birth is the place where the word begins."[40] The word itself comes from the world, from "Earth, the chatterer, father of all/ speech" (P, 39).

Williams indicates two ways in which contact between words and things is lost: academic observance keeping the language static while the world itself changes; and the imposition of the language of one place upon another place through colonization. He believes that, ideally, a new language should grow out of each place and change as the place itself changes, thus giving each culture its own unique language. Historically, however, this has not been the case. In America, as in Ireland, for example, there are "two opposed split-offs from the full cultural force" causing what Williams calls "a cultural dilemma"--the traditional culture of the land from which the language derives and the actual culture of the place in which it now exists are not one and the same (SE, 135, 138). Williams, because he is American, feels the need to assert or discover an American language that has arisen, over a period of time, in America. Some Americans, of the past and the present, fail to recognize the cultural necessity of having an American language:

> It is conceivable that a new language might have sprung up with the new spectacle and the new conditions, but even genius, if it existed, did not make one. It was an inability of the mind to function in the face of overwhelming odds, a retreat to safety, an immediate defensive organization of whatever sort against the wilderness. As an emergency, the building up of such a front was necessary and understandable. But if the falsity of the position is to be appreciated, what they did must be understood to have been a temporary expedient, permissible only while understanding was building. (SE, 134-35)

What is needed, therefore, is a revolution--not against England this time, but against the English language, especially English literary language.

Again Williams indicates that the freedom fighters, by using the colloquial language of their own environment, are in rebellion against Eliot, who "fell back after a gallant attack, fell back into knowledge and its ensieged-besieged citadel where it is stagnant English: which is perfectly all right except for what went before it--in his case: implications, connotations" (EK, 34). Williams believes that Joyce, for example, is "cutting away all England" by using language that is Irish rather than English: "Joyce is obviously a catholic Irishman writing english, his style shows it and that is, less obviously, its virtue" (SE, 77). Joyce's style, according to Williams, is a result of his culture, in which spoken Irish words differ drastically, in sound and in meaning, from the same words as used in England.

In America, as R. W. B. Lewis points out, Walt Whitman understood the necessity of naming his own world:

> And the process of naming is for Whitman nothing less than the process of creation. This new Adam is both maker and namer; his innocent pleasure, untouched by humility, is colored by the pride of one who looks at his work and finds it good. The things that are named seem to spring into being at the sound of the word. It was through the poetic act that Whitman articulated the dominant metaphysical illusion of his day and became the creator of his own world.[41]

But Williams voices the frustration of being unable to express his own locality when he says, "Oh, I cannot say it. There is no word" (CI, 3, 12), and he also understands the problems that occur when something in the new environment is expressed with a word whose source is in another place. If Americans who come from a European background continue to relate American things to things they have seen in Europe, they will miss that which is new and unique about America, as the early settlers failed to distinguish the American thrush from the English robin:

> They saw birds with rusty breasts and called them robins. Thus, from the start, an America of which they could have had no inkling drove the first settlers upon their past. They retreated for warmth and reassurance to something previously familiar. But at a cost. For what they saw were not robins. They were thrushes only vaguely resembling the rosy, daintier English bird. Larger, stronger, and in the evening of a wilder, lovelier song, actually here was something the newcomers had never in their lives before encountered. Blur. Confusion. A bird that beats with his wings and slows himself with his tail in landing. (SE, 134)

When the settlers attempted to view the new world in terms of the knowledge gained in the past, they saw nothing clearly, "Meanwhile, nostalgically, erroneously, a robin" (SE, 134). The language of a place must include all of those things that exist in that place, and that are unique to that place, but this is impossible if the language is not derived there.

The language itself must change, then, in order to keep up with the changes in the actual world--changes that take place in a particular place with the passage of time, and changes in the environmental conditions as people move from one place to another. Williams recognizes that changes in the actual world make some words obsolete and create the necessity for new words: "For it must not be forgot that we smell, hear and see with words and words alone, and that with a new language we smell, hear and see afresh . . ." (SE, 266). Contact with the actual world, which gives words their life, also kills them as the world itself changes. A new language, or a language that is renewed through contact, opens up the new possibilities of the place and time:

> And the difficulty is all with words. With worn and broken words we are trying to do the same that men with new, sharp-edged words have done before. That is why the best minds of

> our century--some of them--are bent first on inventing a new language--and how they are hated for it. (EK, 107)

The danger of using a language that is "worn out" or "divorced" from place is revealed in Paterson, where Mrs. Cumming's inability to communicate becomes literally her downfall:

> She was married with empty words:
> better to
> stumble at
> the edge
> to fall
> fall
> and be
>
> --divorced
> from the insistence of place--
> from knowledge,
> from learning--the terms
> foreign, conveying no immediacy, pouring down.
> --divorced
> from time (no invention more), bald as an
> egg .
> and leaped (or fell) without a
> language, tongue-tied
> the language worn out .
> (P, 83-84)

The new language of which Williams speaks is based primarily on the immediacy of spoken, colloquial language as opposed to the language of academics trying to retain and conserve a language that may no longer be the language of the living culture. The language that the "best minds" are inventing is the language that they are speaking and hearing--words that "have a contour and a complexion imposed upon them by the weather, by the shapes of men's lives in places" (SE, 132). Williams says that "the word I am seeking is in your mouth" (GAN, 166), and that the language of his writing is taken from out of the mouths of "Polish mothers" who were his patients. For Williams, then, the speech that is simultaneously his own voice, the voice of his culture, and a revolutionary new language, is American speech: "Where else can what we are seeking arise but speech? From speech, from American speech as distinct from English speech . . ." (SE, 289-90).

To be an American writer, therefore, is to use the American language. The distinction between American writing and English writing is, in Williams' view, not a matter of choice--it is a natural difference between languages: "Why bother with English when we have a language of our own?" (Int, 100). But the American's natural use of American language is "revolutionary" because it constitutes a break from England and English literary tradition:

> The American idiom is the language we speak in the United States. It is characterized by certain differences from the language used among cultured Englishmen, being completely free from all influences which can be summed up as having to do with "the Establishment." This, pared to essentials, is the language which governed Walt Whitman in his choice of words. It constituted a revolution in the language. (Int, 101)

Perhaps the most important consequence of Williams' belief that in the American language every word must be "broken off from the European mass" (GAN, 175) is that the uniqueness of each culture is revealed in its literature. American writing, by employing American language, meets Greek and Latin works on an equal level, not as a copy of the works of a master--as Greek and Latin works are written in the language of their creators, so American works should be written in the American idiom. If each work is "particular to its own idiom" (P, "Author's Introduction") a dialogue begins, in which Paterson is "a reply to Greek and Latin with the bare hands" (P, 2).

But neither Pound nor Eliot believes in such a dialogue. While Pound, as Donald Davie points out, wants "to create or re-create a *lingua* franca of Græco-Roman Christendom in which English would operate as a sister language with French and Spanish and Italian,"[42] Eliot is concerned that language should not change too quickly:

> We cannot, in literature, any more than in the rest of life, live in a perpetual state of revolution. If every generation of poets made it their task to bring poetic diction up to date with the spoken language, poetry would fail in one of its most important obligations. For poetry should help, not only to refine the language of the time, but to prevent it from changing too rapidly: a development of language at too great a speed would be a development in the sense of a progressive deterioration, and that is our danger to-day.[43]

As Paul Mariani points out, Eliot calls for an end to experimentation and a return to a more academic view of language on the part of poets,[44] and Eliot himself says that poets must "avoid the danger of servitude to colloquial speech and to current jargon."[45]

But for Williams change, and changes in spoken language, are elements of a living culture, and literature must express the culture in its present form. If language itself, the actual words, cannot be changed quickly enough to identify experiences that take place in a particular place at a particular time, then cultures must be identified by means of literary forms that reveal that culture itself: "I find that there is work to be done in the creation of new forms, new names for experience" (SA, 117).

CHAPTER 6

"WORDS MOULDED BY THE IMPACTS OF EXPERIENCE":

CULTURE AND FORM

> [The artist] has first to speak the truth. Second to share the truth in such a form that the form itself will be an image of what is said. So that not the least stroke will be amiss or redundant. Third, that the truth, as Ibsen said, becomes a lie every twenty years, and must be reborn in a new form every generation: significant form.
>
> It is an image of the times then, in relation to other times, that the artist is attempting. And a continual, agelong criticism of past times to suit the necessities, the discoveries, the total knowledge, the greater release of the human spirit that each age seeks to add to the last. He begins in rebellion against a material through which shines the genius of the past--today not to be captured. He works with his own faulty materials and tries to recreate, in his day, the same glories, and to increase them.
>
> But it is, in fact, a poem, so many words inscribed on a piece of paper. Language, our own everyday speech. The speech analyzed for its variance from the classic norm, all the colors, the "defects" which give it its character of today. Its variations from the pace, the meter, as American varies from English. Our way of speaking. This is part of its social imperative. (ARI, 109)

One of the basic tenets of the contact theory is that writing is "a vast discharge of energy forced by the impact of experience into form" (CI, 2, cover), or, as reiterated ten years later in the second version of Contact, literature is "words moulded by the impacts of experience (not for the depths of experience they speak of but the fulfillment of experience which they are)" (CII, 1:1, 9). Williams believes that an "intrinsic form" (SE, 256) can be found in the contact between the poem and the experience from which it is derived, so that the contact simultaneously frees the form from restrictions of convention, and governs the form that the poem takes.

The attempt to find form through experience does seem plausible, even though what Williams calls "the experimental method" (SE, 291) is little more than an attitude towards the creation of forms, and not an actual methodology. But this attitude is crucial because it does distinguish the approach to form taken by Williams, who seeks form through contact with the life around him, from forms which, in their lack of regular metrical patterns, stanza forms, or rhyme schemes might appear to have been created upon the same basis as a poem by Williams, but which are given their basic structure through contact with other literature--mythic patterns, for example--and not from life itself. Williams does not attempt to give form, but rather to find form. He even provides a somewhat convincing argument that direct, physical contact with the American environment does provide a way that form can express America's localism and its democratic principles while revealing the place itself--a way to govern form without confining or subjugating it to preconceived notions of form, and without allowing it absolute freedom: "We do not seek to 'transfer the center of the universe' here. We seek only contact with the local conditions which confront us. We believe that in the perfection of that contact is the beginning not only of the concept of art among us but the key to the technique also" (CI, 1, 10).

But Williams' approach to form presupposes a notion that is, at least for the poet, as restrictive as any conventional form, and it is based upon preconceived notions of what America is, and what the modern world is as well. Williams contends that the American emphasis on actual experience and actual conditions at hand offers in art, as in politics, a revolutionary new order that is distinct from the order of Europe and of the past. He aggrandizes contact with experience until it becomes the only American way and the only modern way to find form. While liberty and discovery are the catchwords in Williams' rhetoric, he argues that each form must be revolutionary, not evolutionary--conventional forms, or innovative forms that are variations or manipulations of conventional forms, cannot express America or the modern world.

To assert that contact with experience is the base upon which all American art and all modern art is created is unjustifiable; it is a repudiation of the principles of liberty upon which the approach is supposedly based, and it is a rejection of cultural relativism, also supposedly a precept of the contact theory, because not all cultures are democratic, nor do they necessarily deny tradition--the culture in another place could be distinct from American culture, and therefore that culture might be better expressed in a conventional form. While Williams might have argued that part of the creative process is directed towards form as well as content, his argument and his rationale for advocating experimentation and diversity of form are faulty. He makes his argument a forum for more political propagandizing, while still believing he is being liberal and tolerant. He imposes his own view of America on other American artists, and his view of the modern world on all artists.

What Williams calls "intrinsic" or "significant" form is, in effect, what Denise Levertov, in "A Further Definitions" and the essay to which it is appended, "Some Notes on Organic Form," calls "organic"; in fact, Williams says to make the poem "an organism" (SL, 269) that grows out of the experience it expresses, so that "a sense of completion" (SA, 117) will be brought to that experience. Levertov, setting out clearly what Williams often only insinuates, says that organic form is based on the concepts that ". . . there is a form in all things (and in our experience) which the poet can discover and reveal,"[1] and that "There is a poetry that in thought and in feeling and in perception seeks the forms peculiar to these experiences."[2] The artist finds the form of his work by allowing the world to reveal it to him. In Williams' words, "The weather changes and man adapts his methods that he may survive, one by one, in order to be there for agreements later" (SE, 210). If pre-conceived form is not imposed on the work, order might be discovered even where the artist had not thought it had existed--he will discover order at the same time as he creates it: "Order is what is discovered after the fact, not a little piss pot for us all to urinate into--and call ourselves satisfied" (SL, 214).

Levertov explains that, although poetry of organic form is often mistaken for "free verse," it is governed by the experience itself; the poet must let "the experience lead him through the world of the poem, its unique inscape revealing itself as he goes." In such poetry, ". . . content and form are in a state of dynamic interaction; the understanding of whether an experience is a linear sequence or a constellation raying out from and into a central focus or axis, for instance, is discoverable only in the work, not before it":[3]

> In organic poetry the metric movement, the measure, is the direct expression of the movement of perception. And the sounds, acting together with the measure, are a kind of extended onomatopoeia--i.e., they imitate not the sounds of an experience (which may well be soundless, or to which sounds contribute only incidentally)--but the feeling of an experience, its emotional tone, its texture. The varying speed and gait of different strands of perception within an experience (I think of the strands of seaweed moving within a wave) result in counterpointed measures.[4]

Levertov summarizes this explanation of organic form by saying, "Form is never more than a revelation of content,"[5] which is to say, in Williams' terms, that there is a direct relationship, or contact, between the form of a poem and the experience from which the poem is derived.

As Levertov herself indicates, such a concept of poetic form is not new, and she points to statements by Coleridge and Emerson to make her point.[6] Yet there are two differences, primarily differences of attitude, between organic form and the view of form presented in the contact theory. Whereas Levertov says that organic form will "imitate" "the feeling of an experience," Williams says that the poem is the "fulfillment of experience," and while Emerson looks beyond the physical experience itself, Williams focuses on the senses.

Emerson's attitude towards form is based upon a belief in "the Divine mind" that creates the harmony of composition:

> We feel, in seeing a noble building, which rhymes well, as we do in hearing a perfect song, that it is spiritually organic; that is, had a necessity, in Nature, for being; was one of the possible forms in the Divine mind, and is now only discovered and executed by the artist, not arbitrarily composed by him.[7]

But for Williams the answer to form is found in the experience itself, and in the artist's sense of that experience. For Williams, "The object of writing is to celebrate the triumph of sense" (CI, 5, 1), and sense here has connotations of insight into the particular experience of the poem itself--making sense of the experience or the culture--which can be done only through the bodily senses. Williams wishes to capture in language the essence, the "radiant gist," of that which the poem embodies:

> The solution then is, take the thing that is and see it through. What is, exactly that which exists and the only solution is for genius to see it in all its implications. The trouble is as troubled water, in the lack of clarity in the application. (IWWP, 23)

Form, therefore, is determined by the relationship between the artist's sense of the situation and the situation itself, in harmony with one another in what Williams considers a dance; a dance that is determined not by laws or rules, but by the music of the situation itself.

For Williams, the attachment to reality gives art a reality of its own. As words themselves become more than representations of things, but gain an existence of their own through contact with things, so by bringing the actual world to life by putting it in action, usually in the present tense, the poet does more than describe reality, he creates a new reality: ". . . the verb calls it/ into being" (PB, 110). The work then can be seen as a creation in its own right, not as a recreation of a given scene:

> To copy nature is a spineless activity; it gives us a sense of our mere existence but hardly more than that. But to imitate nature involves the verb: we then ourselves become nature, and so invent an object which is an extension of the process. (SL, 297)

Williams does not want art to copy life, but, through contact with life, to embody that life in a new form. According to Williams, the artist "holds no mirror up to nature but with his imagination rivals nature's composition with his own" (SA, 121). He believes that the work of art itself cannot come alive if it "tries to be 'like' life" (SA, 129), and therefore the work must make "The jump between fact and the imaginative reality" (SA, 135), which is "to imitate, not to copy nature" (PB, 109).

The distinction Williams makes between a copy and an imitation is the distinction between the mere photographic image of the situation and the insight into the "radiant gist" of that situation, a distinction Williams also makes "between realism and cubism with everything in favor of the latter."[8] The form, then, is not a copy of the scene it depicts; it is for Williams an image of the artist's understanding of that scene, so that the form itself is part of the artist's very expression of that scene:

> In writing, as in art generally, sense is in the form.
> Note: "Subject matter", so-called, as opposed to "form", an abstraction, is a distinction that does not exist in a work of art save as a division between types of material. (CI, 5, 1)

In fact, for Williams, "It is not what you say that matters but the manner in which you say it; there lies the secret of the ages" (SE, preface).

In a review of poems by Richard Aldington, D. H. Lawrence, James Joyce, and Dorothy Richardson, Williams uses as the basis of his judgment the relationship of the poems' forms and styles to their subjects. He denounces the poems by Aldington and Lawrence because, although they are war poems, they do not embody, in their language, meter, pace, syntax, and uniqueness of form, the particular war of which they speak--the poetic form does not distinguish that particular war from any other war:

> In any case one looks in vain for a glimpse of distortion, a glimpse of agony, a glimpse of flame to rise counter to the gross flame of mud even that enveloped the armies in the field. I do not say it was possible. I say merely that the thing is absent from these poems. They are empty nonsense having no relation to the place or the time they were written in. They have no existence.[9]

The poems can "exist" only when they are generated by a specific setting. This setting is revealed not only by the subject, but also by the form in which that subject is expressed.

In contrast with these works by Aldington and Lawrence, the works by Joyce and Richardson do, according to Williams, have an existence that is revealed in their form:

> Joyce and Richardson do not err in the way I have indicated. Of course they are not writing of war, nor is their work influenced thereby but I cannot help that. Their form lives! It is not a bed. It is not to put one to sleep. It lives in its today.
>
> They plunge naked into the flaming cauldron of today. Insofar as their form goes the war exists in it, carries its own meaning. It is a different war, it is not like other wars, it is modern, it exists, it is not a thing to spitlick.[10]

It is precisely the difference between this war and other wars that necessitates a form that is different from other forms.

Williams' arguments regarding form are essentially the same as his arguments for a language directly in contact with the locality. Although new names, in effect a new language, cannot be supplied constantly to give value to the uniqueness of each experience, the poet can identify the unique value of the experience through poetic form. Forms, like words themselves, become the embodiment of that which they express, and through form a situation in a particular time and place can remain alive eternally, because it can be experienced through the work of art: "A life that is here and now is timeless. That is the universal I am seeking: to embody that in a work of art, a new world that is always 'real'" (SE, 196).

Also like words, the work of art becomes an object in its own right, through contact with the actual world. Objectivism, according to George Oppen, meant not only that the word is an object, or that the artist focuses on objects rather than abstractions, but meant also "to objectify the poem, to make the poem an object. Meant form."[11] In the poem a situation is objectified--that is, the writer has "given it a form, a human habitation and a place--you know, the Shakespeare stuff" (Int, 25), so that each time the work is read or viewed by an audience the audience enters into that situation.

It is this contact between the poem and the experience from which it derives that, like the contact between words and things that gives words their own existence, gives poems a "reality":

> Poems have a separate existence uncompelled by nature or the supernatural. There is a "special" place which poems, as all works of art, must occupy, but it is quite definitely the same as that where bricks or colored threads are handled. (SE, 125)

In this sense, ". . . it is the form which is the meaning"[12] because it is in the form that the culture lives: "I repeat, it cannot be said what we are and what we do. It can only be proved by our creation of formal configurations that we were and so remain."[13]

But in presenting "the sense of the moment" through "continually refreshed crystallizations of form" (CI, 5, 2), the poet creates "configurations fresh to our senses" (EK, 17)--the reader senses the poem itself. Williams, although at times he seems to deny the possibility of any experience that is not of the actual world, understands that the reader enters the world of the work of art. Williams himself, in Spring and All, invites the reader "to read and to see" (SA, 89). Once the writer presents the text, the reader re-creates the scene for himself, and in doing so he lives that scene in his imagination, experiencing what the author experienced--the "I" of the work becomes simultaneously "myself" and "you":

> In the imagination, we are from henceforth (so long as you read) locked in a fraternal embrace, the classic caress of author and reader. We are one. Whenever I say, "I" I mean also, "you." And so, together, as one, we shall begin. (SA, 89)

Once the experience has been made into a work of art it is like the house that Williams describes in Kora in Hell, in that it participates in its own creation along with those who actually build it, and then can be entered by others, who alter that house simply by opening and closing the door: "If one shut the door of a house he is to that extent a carpenter" (KH, 72).

However, although Williams recognizes that the reader enters into the world of the text, he underestimates the power of words and the power of imagination when he argues that the reader can only enter a text that is based on actuality. If a thing or an event that has existed in the actual world can be imagined, there is no reason why an event imagined by the writer might not also be imagined by the reader. What is important, as Alla Bozarth-Campbell explains, is that the poem itself brings the event alive for the reader:

> The creative process of both poet and interpreter is centered in the realization of the poem. In a sense the poet is also interested in the embodiment or incarnation of the poem, because the very process of its coming into being through and beyond the poet is a bodily dialogue. The poet is interpreter insofar as the work that is coming to be held out as a subject expressing itself, articulating its own being, and is helped in any way possible. The interpreter is a kind of poet, because he or she is a participant in the process of making something genuinely new. This making, as has been suggested, is the outcome of the joining of two beings in a single presentational event.[14]

Williams is incorrect in emphasizing that it is physical contact that makes art "always concrete, objective" (EK, 56), because the art object, the work itself, can be a creation of the imagination even without contact with the locality. He assumes that the only way to embody the culture is to express particular experiences, but this emphasis on experience is Williams' own perspective of American culture, and is not necessarily a part of other cultures. He argues that early American painters were "eminently objective, their paintings always remained things" (SE, 333-34), and that attention to the actual world is what distinguishes American art, but because he associates America with the modern world, he assumes that all cultures in the modern world must be expressed by embodying experience.

The problem, then, is that while Williams believes that art is an expression of culture, not only in its subject matter but in its form as well, he believes that the culture of the age itself is dominated by American ideology. Instead of focusing on a place, and the beliefs in a particular place, Williams speaks of "the age," and the beliefs of that age:

> Unless every age claims the world for its own and makes it so by its own efforts in its own day and unless the mark of this effort and success is left upon all forms of that age including those formal expressions which we call art, no one can be said to have lived in any age at any time.[15]

It then becomes the age, not the place or the experience, which creates "a form which has been characteristic of it . . . to live in forever."[16] Williams assumes that when literature "deals with reality, the actuality of everyday," it "naturally reflects its time, by coincidence" (SL, 131). But this assumption is itself a part of the "conceptual world" that Williams has created because of his interpretation of American ideology. Even Williams understands, at times, that what is more important than the actual world is the conceptual world:

> The term "objectivism" (useful only as a screw driver is useful to a carpenter or a mechanic and not for label purposes) helped some of us for a year or two to associate the subject and the form of a poem into a whole. The poem being made of words the form itself becomes a "word". An 8th century form, that is, means in some measure the whole conceptual world of the 8th century which invented it and to which it is fitted whereas a

> 20th century form should embody, if possible, something of the astrophysical, chemical, sociological makeup of its day.[17]

Unfortunately, though, he does not recognize that his conceptual world, in which attachment to actual experience is of utmost importance, is not a world shared by all people or all cultures--not even by all Americans.

From his perspective, the old, European standards of measuring the rhythm of language or the forms that written language take are no more valid in America or in the modern world than monarchies or Euclidean geometry are: "The very grounds of our beliefs have altered. We do not live that way any more; nothing in our lives, at bottom, is ordered according to that measure . . ." (SE, 337). For Williams, these new "grounds of our beliefs" are American and they are democratic, so that while "A new world/ is only a new mind" (PB, 76), to be American is to be part of the new world that is America and American ideology. Unless a poet is American, at least in the sense of believing in the American democratic ideology, the modern ideology, then a new poetry cannot be produced because "unless there is/ a new mind there cannot be a new/ line" (P, 50). According to Williams, this new line changes the very nature of poetry because, as the title of a late essay indicates, "A New Line is a New Measure,"[18] and this measure is simultaneously the expression of and the creation of the reality of America: "And what is reality? How do we know reality? The only reality we can know is MEASURE" (SE, 283).

Ostensibly, the new order based upon experience is only a way to distinguish American culture from European culture--a way to determine order in a poem without restricting that order to conventional forms reveals the American spirit in that same way that the strict, conventional forms invented in Europe, and the emphasis on innovation rather than revolution, express the nature of European culture itself:

> So, I think it is our duty as Americans, our devotional duty, let's say, to take out the spirit that has made not only Greek and Latin and French poetry but British poetry also, and which restricts us when we're too stern about following their modes, and put it into something which will be far more liberating to the mind and the spirit of man, if I'm going to be philosophic in that sense. Back of it all, that is the theory. (*Int*, 25-26)

Distinctions in form are, therefore, cultural distinctions, and Williams insists that cultural differences are based upon place: "Order is nothing else than one of the kinds of affirmation of the same thing: place" (*EK*, 133):

> It is not possible, in other words, to have excellence without a development from the base, in a culture, a belief held by a group in a certain place, which through work becomes more and more adapted to that place to embody it in sensual expression. It cannot be imported, it would not be applicable or understandable, it must be made where it is to be out of what exists there--otherwise it will not have the time dimension or the breadth of base to resist lateral pressure and include the *whole* of the expression *possible* to that place. (*ARI*, 223)

But instead of distinguishing between the cultures of various places, and allowing for differences in those cultures, Williams sees only the modern world, which is American, and the past, which is European. He cannot recognize political changes that have taken place in Europe because those changes have primarily been evolutionary, not revolutionary. Hand in hand with Williams' view that forms which express the American sensibility must necessarily be "liberating to the mind and spirit of man" is his view that European forms cannot be modern because Europe itself has not fully entered the modern world.[19] Metrical verse and conventional forms express, for Williams, the aristocratic and feudal background of European culture. He believes that until Europe has a revolution that will destroy the whole social, political, and cultural structure and will bring them into the modern world of relativity, individualism, and attention to immediate conditions (essentially giving them American values), European artists cannot produce works that simultaneously express European culture and are truly modern. In "The Venus," an episode from A Voyage to Pagany, Dev tells Fraulein von J. about the benefits of America as a place without a long, aristocratic tradition: "I think it is useful to us, he continued, because it is near savagery. In Europe, you are so far from it that maybe you will have to die before you can live again" (Nov, 333).

According to Williams, "a new measure," both a new standard of art in the modern world and a new way of measuring poetic meter, is practically impossible anywhere else but in America because the United States is the only nation that has rejected the feudal past: "But with our history, such seeking, such attempts toward a new measure, are particularly appropriate and, I believe, have an exceptional opportunity to succeed."[20] Quoting J. B. Kerfoot, Williams relates breakthroughs in poetic form to the democratic spirit in America fighting against European aristocracy: "Perhaps you are unfamiliar with this 'new poetry' that is called 'revolutionary.' It is the expression of democracy of feeling rebelling against as aristocracy of form" (Nov, 316). Williams calls conventional English poetic form "the form of empire,"[21] and he believes that Americans have a duty to reject conventional forms that have become known as poetry in order to open new possibilities of the poem itself, just as they had to recognize the new possibilities of America itself by rejecting European forms of government.[22]

Williams does recognize, however, that in actuality few American poets have rejected conventional forms outright, and he sees this as their failure, because they look back to old forms, to accept American culture. Again, in Williams' view, this failure is particularly evident in the works of Pound and Eliot:

> That is by avoiding the difficult formal problems presented they found themselves stripped of the philosophical and psychic underpinnings which make up the very rock upon which any new and more highly developed cultural necessities rest for us today. So that Pound and Eliot have slipped back, intellectually, from their early promise. Which is to say that the form and the gist, the very meat, of a new cultural understanding are interlinked inseparably.
>
> That is why the question of FORM is so important and merits such devotion and the keenest of wits, because it is the very matter itself of a culture. We cannot go back because then the form becomes empty, we must move into the field of action and go into combat on the new ground. (SL, 227)

But Pound and Eliot are not the only two American poets Williams singles out for failing to adopt indigenous forms; although Williams can appreciate Yvor Winters' skill, he does not believe that Winters' forms express American culture:

> He went back to the conventional stanza and his best work has done some fine things, but how empty they seem to me when taken with the view I have of our culture as a whole. His poems are tight, hopeless, sterile. Maybe our culture is the same. In that case I'm a fool--but I don't believe it. (SL, 227-28)

Williams does recognize, however, that by breaking away from traditional forms, the writer risks being misunderstood, particularly by those who view all literature in terms of tradition: "Within the tradition lies 'perfection,' the Sacred Grove, a study of Dryden. Outside is imperfection and formative chaos" (SE, 84). According to Williams, even those who do not necessarily view art in terms of tradition may not appreciate the new: "Everything new must be wrong at first since there is always a moment when the living new supplants that which has been and still is right and is thus sure to be wrong in transit, or until it is seen that that which was right is dead" (SE, 60).

Williams, then, against his own advice, has preconceived notions about what it is to be American and what it is to be modern. He looks at art, somewhat in the way that Joseph McCarthy looked at politics, to find those aspects of form that are un-American, and therefore not modern either. For Williams, the turn towards conventional forms in modern poetry is "the sickening turn toward death," in which the vital, living culture is made into "a pretty thing, a bouquet frozen in an icecake" (KH, 71). Only the dead, like the man in Paterson who is found in the river ice, can be contained in a conventional form: "It is impossible to write modern poetry today in the old forms."[23] Again conventional forms, "lousey [sic] with mediaeval filth,"[24] are seen as forms of the past, not of other cultures that might still exist outside America, or outside Williams' view of America.

Unfortunately, Williams even resorts to political clichés and rhetorical devices to make it seem that, by limiting poetry to organic form, he is actually offering liberty:

> How then can a man seriously speak of order when the most that he is doing is to impose a structural character taken over from the habits of the past upon his content? This is sheer bastardy. Where in that is the work, the creation which gives the artist his status as a man? And what is a man saying of moment as an artist when he neglects his major opportunity, to build his living, complex day into the body of his poem? (SE, 217)

The opportunity to discover new forms is, in Williams' view, lost because of tyranny and subjugation by conventional forms, which suppress new truths offered by a new world.

Williams believes that when forms are not derived through sensual contact with the poet's native environment, those forms cannot express the truths of that environment. The truth becomes falsified by the form in which it is expressed. He does not want his own life, or the forms he uses to express himself, to be limited by foreign or traditional forms, whether they are forms of government or forms of expression:

> They even modify the thought of the language. The forms modify the thought.
>
> That's why the priests of all sorts, the priest, generally speaking, whether Christian or otherwise, sticks to ritual, because he knows if he can get those people to repeat that ritual, they are caught. They are snared, for life, for good or for evil, whatever it may be, but they are snared. (*Int*, 25)

Snared within the confines of a fixed form, the poet is, according to Williams, unable to think beyond the limitations of what that form itself offers:

> Why not write sonnets? Because, unless the idea implied in the configuration can be de-formed it has not been *used* but copied. *All* sonnets mean the same thing because it is the configuration of the words that is the major significance. Because it is a configuration (the sonnet) whose meaning supersedes any idea that may be crammed into it. It is not an invention but anchors beyond the will--does not liberate the intelligence but stultifies it--and by its cleverness, apt use stultifies it the more by making pleasurable that which should be removed. (*EK*, 17)

From this perspective, even the most skilfully crafted poems written in conventional forms are of little artistic value because they do not open possibilities in the genre itself, and also because the modern world cannot be expressed in a sonnet form. In Williams' opinion, the poet who expresses the twentieth-century situation in a sonnet has not had any insight into his world, but has been "subjugated" by a concept of what poetic form is. Williams even dislikes the term "poetry," because it implies that there is a particular set of conventions that limits the possibilities of form:

> . . . I speak of the poem, an address toward the poem, not of poetry. Rightly considered there is no such thing as poetry; that is, for the grammarian there is, obviously such a thing; but the poem precedes such a concept and supersedes it to such an extent that the other (poetry per se) can be positively a barrier to appreciation. Many believe that in some way poetry governs the poem so that it comes to some of us almost as a shock that something called "poetry" may block an appreciation of a new poem.[25]

Williams believes that Marianne Moore's poetry, for example, is valuable because the reader does not find a form that he expects, because of convention, to find. Instead, he finds a new perspective on what may be an old subject. He sees that subject as it is today:

> He will perceive absolutely nothing except that his whole preconceived scheme of values has been ruined. And this is exactly what he should see, a break through all preconception of poetic form and mood and pace, a flaw, a crack in the bowl. It is this that one means when he says destruction and creation are simultaneous. But this is not easy to accept. Miss Moore, using the same material as all others before her, comes to it so effectively at a new angle as to throw out of fashion the classical conventional poetry to which one is used and puts her own and that about her in its place. (Nov, 310-11)

The implication is, therefore, that the lack of conventional form constitutes the discovery of new possibilities of poetic form, and Williams believes that "Discoveries are the life blood of the arts as of the sciences, of love, of anything you may name."[26]

It is this freshness or newness of expression that is for Williams the discovery that allows for a whole new field of possibility:

> The analogy between the poem and the scientific advance is here again of use.
>
> Shakespeare is so to be judged. So too is the explanation why at the beginning of a movement, when a new form is set, the chief poems are created. It is not novelty, though of necessity the great must [be] the new, it is the increase of knowledge that is the deciding point.

> Or, if not the increase of knowledge in an absolute sense, it may be the representation of knowledge from an illegible script. (EK, 74-75)

As Williams himself indicates, this is not to say that a new form necessarily expresses a new truth, something that has not been known before, but only that truth itself is relative, and cannot remain static:

> The natural corrective is the salutary mutation in the expression of all truths, the continual change without which no symbol remains permanent. It must change, it must reappear in another form, to remain permanent. It is the image of the Phoenix. (SE, 208)

Discovery necessarily involves experimentation, and in Contact Williams and McAlmon state their intention "to be open-minded toward all experiment--ourselves feeling that many literary forms, the novel, the short story, and metrical verse, are mannered, copied and pretentious technique . . ." (CI, 1, 1). Experimentation is important, from this perspective, even if it has only "given us great freedom and told us nothing more" (ARI, 200). Williams does understand, however, that the success or failure of experimental work must constantly be in question; works are not necessarily successful simply because they are experimental: "The poem is what we are after" (SE, 291).

But while Williams says that he is "broadly open to all experiment--some of which will be futile,"[27] his theory limits the possibility of what kind of experiments and discoveries can be made. The most questionable aspect of Williams' comments about form is his argument that changes brought about through experimentation can only be revolutionary, not evolutionary.[28] In Williams' view of the revolution of form, nothing of the past survives: "Can they not see and why not? but for lethargy--that literature is and must be constantly in revolution, being reborn and that exactly that is the only classic" (Nov, 283). But such a statement is simply false, or else it is an extremely narrow view of what constitutes a classic.

Williams' belief is that in literature, and in politics, a state of almost perpetual revolution must exist in order for liberty to be maintained. He does not acknoweldge that changes can take place gradually through the modification of existing literary or political forms, and for this reason he cannot see the value of innovations such as e. e. cummings' sonnets or Robert Frost's iambic pentameter. Perhaps more important, he does not appreciate the formal developments of The Waste Land, or the developments made possible by Pound's borrowings from other languages, particularly Japanese and Chinese, because he is convinced that those forms do not embody the culture in which they were created or express the cultural background of their creators: innovation is un-American.

Williams believes that in order to be reborn, literary forms must first die, which is to say that they must not be used again. The poet's first task, as Williams sees it, is to "break down the form--the ikon":[29] "The first thing we must do as poets (poor things!) is to throw it out, body and soul. Why? To build, if we are men, something better."[30] The choice, in Williams' opinion, is simple: "Either to return to rules, more or less arbitrary in their delineations, or to go ahead; to invent other forms by using a new measure. A NEW MEASURE CONSONANT WITH OUR DAY."[31] Williams is extremely uncompromising in his position, believing that "the whole house has to come down" so that it can be "rebuilt by unbound thinking" (SE, 163).

But the rejection of conventional form is not an end in itself;

the attempt to find order in the situation being expressed is what Williams sees as the distinguishing feature of modern art:

> The modernist is he who sees through the modern--to an essential and continuous organization that exists in it, perfectly so that to him there is no confusion, no necessity to go back, or to look ahead--he gets his pleasure, here, now-- (R, 34)

Instead of translating the "hidden language" of communication that exists when the artist is in contact with his world into a "replica" of common speech, as poets of the past had done, Williams argues that the poet must now express that communication directly:

> But of old poets would translate this hidden language into a kind of replica of the speech of the world with certain distinctions of rhyme and meter to show that it was not really that speech. Nowadays the elements of that language are set down as heard and the imagination of the listener and of the poet are left free to mingle in the dance. (KH, 59)

The language of which Williams writes is not, therefore, simply the spoken language of which Wordsworth writes in the preface to Lyrical Ballads; for Williams, the form is part of the language itself because it is part of the medium of communication. To manipulate the order, pace, and sequence of the words is, from this perspective, to change the "hidden language" of communication between the poet and his subject. Williams insists that what differentiates poetry of the twentieth century is its proximity to the reality of the day:

> What I put down of value will have this value: an escape from crude symbolism, the annihilation of strained associations, complicated ritualistic forms designed to separate the work from "reality"--such as rhyme, meter as meter and not as the essential of the work, one of its words. (SA, 102)

Williams' mistake, though, is in believing that only by revealing the actual, physical contact can the artist create an art object that is "not realism, but reality itself." Because he has the idea that attention to the actual world is the modern way, he makes it a requisite of modern art, for "all artists, everywhere":

> Hard down on it--laboring to catch the structure of the thing, language must be moulded.
>
> By this we are able to learn from the thing itself the ways of its own most profound implications, as all artists, everywhere, must be doing. (CII, 1:2, 110)

But despite his mistake in attempting to convince others that contact with the actual world is the only American way, and the only modern way, to govern form, the "continuous" attempt to "make" a poem that conveys "exact significances" of "the environment to which it is native" (SE, 257), guides Williams in his own search for forms. For Williams, "reality in our own place and day"[32] needs "a new invention by the poet to embody it."[33] His own task, as set by himself, is to find "continually refreshed crystallizations of form" to embody his own experience of America.

CHAPTER 7

WILLIAMS' LITERARY FORMS

> Jefferson said it. We should have a revolution of some sort in America every ten years. The truth has to be redressed, re-examined, reaffirmed in a new mode. There has to be new poetry. But the thing is that the change, the greater material, the altered structure of the inevitable revolution must be _in_ the poem, in it. Made of it. It must shine in the structural body of it. (_SE_, 217)

> And I feel that in a democracy, in a life that the paleontologists tell us has only existed consciously 700,000 years or something of that sort--a very brief thing--there's a lot yet to discover in the way we behave and what we do and what we think. And the way to discover it is to be an iconoclast, which means to break the icon, to get out from inside that strictly restricting mold or ritual and get out, not because we want to get out of it, because the secret spirit of that ritual can exist only in that form, but once that form is broken, the spirit of it comes out and can take again a form which will be more contemporary. (_Int_, 25-26)

The forms used by Williams in his own work, and his comments about those forms, attest to his concern for putting the contact theory into practice. He attempts, simultaneously, to break out of conventional forms and to create new forms that express his contact with the world around him. As Williams himself admits, while after 1910 he always breaks out of conventional forms, he does not always find forms that are governed by any discernible principle besides revolution for the sake of revolution. Gradually, though, by the 1920s, he begins to see that the situation itself can determine not only the form, but even the genre of the work. The writer, especially the poet, must understand the "hidden language" of the contact between himself and the scene to be presented:

> The poet's task, in any age, is to listen to the language of his time, when it is impassioned and wherever it occurs, and to discover in it, from it, the essentials of his form, his form, as of his own day. From these essentials he makes up his patterns--embodying the characteristics of what he finds alive in his day. This is the task of the major poet in any time.[1]

In Williams' fiction, this language is expressed as little more than a direct transcription of the actual events and the actual conversations that took place. Or, perhaps worse, it becomes solipsistic musings about expressing what is actually taking place at that time. But in the poetry, this "hidden language" is primarily the spoken language of Williams' environment, and because that language is part of the culture it expresses, Williams often succeeds in revealing the culture by revealing the language itself; he uses line endings, in the 1920s especially, to reveal the tactile qualities of the words themselves--their "reality"--and later, in his relative measure, he uses the rhythm of the spoken language to determine line endings. Paterson, which is to a large degree about the need for communication (amongst individuals, and between people and their environment), is Williams' attempt to "embody" his whole "knowable world" (A, 391). But while that knowledge begins with the beginnings of history in Paterson, it continues while the process of the contact itself continues, and has no determinable end, except death.

Ironically, Williams' own break from the traditional forms in which his poems were written before 1910 was brought about by Ezra Pound. Williams himself says that the period before he met Pound at the University of Pennsylvania in 1902, and then after that meeting, are "like B.C. and A.D." (IWWP, 5). Pound was justly and bluntly critical of Poems, a volume that Williams published himself in 1909[2] and that is characterized by the predominance of octosyllabic couplets in which the rhyme scheme influences the syntax of the lines themselves:

> Innocence can never perish;
> Blooms as fair in looks that cherish
> Dim remembrance of the days
> When life was young, as in the gaze
> Of youth himself all rose-yclad,
> Whom but to see is to be glad. . . .[3]

Charles Doyle points out that the "years between 'Poems' and 'The Tempers' (1913) is probably the period when Pound's influence on Williams was most formative";[4] Williams changed from the traditional forms of Poems, which he never reprinted, to the free verse of his poems that were published in the Imagist anthologies of 1914 and 1915.

The works written after Pound's criticisms of Poems and before the ideas expressed in Contact became firmly established, The Tempers (1913), Al Que Quiere! (1917), and Kora in Hell: Improvisations (1920), are Williams' expression of new-found freedom from the restrictions of conventional forms. "Pastoral," from Al Que Quiere! is typical of Williams' work of the period, not only in its direct, unadorned statement, but also in its short lines, each of which is an image in itself but which adds a new dimension to the whole scene:

> The little sparrows
> hop ingenuously
> about the pavement
> quarreling
> with sharp voices
> over those things
> that interest them.
> (CEP, 124)

Thus, even here in what Williams himself considers to be "free verse" the building up of particulars, one upon the other, is the factor that determines the form of the poem.

During this period Williams is, however, an advocate of free verse and of improvisation (writing down whatever comes into his mind) because both break from the restrictions of form:

> But free verse is the ONLY form that CAN CARRY THE NEW MEANING that is imperatively required today. It is the ONE verse form that embodies the quality of thought which can be designated as modern. And it is only the modern which is worth expressing.[5]

But Williams began to realize that free verse, and Kora in Hell, which is organized only in the sense that it includes "something" that Williams had written on each day for a full year (IWWP, 27), have no real rationale to build upon--form is not "free" or random. He therefore began to see little value in the free verse poems being written by the Imagists, and he would say later, "Imagism was not structural: that was the reason for its disappearance" (SE, 283). He also became disillusioned with his own improvisations, perhaps even recognizing while he was writing them that they were only a part of the destruction that is necessary before building begins. He wondered, "When does this downhill turn up again?" (KH, 69). Ultimately Williams recognized that "In the poem a rebellion against older forms means nothing unless, finally, we have a new form to substitute for that which has become empty from the exhaustion of its means" (SE, 272). The problem, however, is that while Williams found a rationale for his attitude towards form, the actual forms of the poems themselves are, to the reader, virtually indistinguishable from free verse.

Nevertheless, once Williams had made that break from conventional forms, he understood that he could "never again write anything to be a certain shape" (R, 12), and his greatest fear was that he would "slip/ into the old mode" when faced with the difficulty of clinging "firmly to the advance" (SA, 103). The forms against which he rebels are not only those of other writers, but his own as well: ". . . one must continually break down what oneself has accomplished. One must come out clean."[6] He believes that once a form has been developed by another writer or by oneself, that form has outlived its function: "After an effective perfection, such an expression is the end of its effectiveness. Then it is the difficult task of another energy to take it apart" (ARI, 223). As Edwin S. Fussell points out, Williams remains, until the end of his life, consistent in his search for new forms, whereas after rebelling briefly against traditional forms, ". . . the American poet (Williams excepted) returns to relative regularity."[7]

Williams' poems written in free verse and his improvisations do seem like a necessary step on the way to the development of a theory that would keep literary forms changing in relation to the changes in the actual world: "I could reject the looseness of free verse. Free verse wasn't verse at all to me. All art is orderly. Yet the early poems disturbed me. They were too conventional, too academic" (IWWP, 65). Williams desires a balance between the absolute freedom of free verse and the confinement of conventional forms, and what he finds in contact is "a liberation of pure forms" (CI, 5, 2), which he believes can be found, like the liberty allowed in America through the democratic process, in its relationship to immediate conditions. Free verse, and the improvisations in Kora in Hell, are not governed by any principle except the destruction of the rigid principles of old forms:

> The virtue of the improvisations is their placement in a world of new values--
> their fault is their dislocation of sense, often complete. But it is the best I could do under the circumstances. It was the best I could do and retain any value to experience at all. (SA, 116-17)

Although the improvisations remove form from the bond of convention and for this reason open the possibility of a new system, their "dislocation of sense," or lack of "sensual contact" is, as Williams understands, their flaw. Publicly, Williams defends the book, saying, "It is the one book I have enjoyed referring to more than any of the others. It reveals myself to me and perhaps that is why I have kept it to myself" (IWWP, 26). But Williams' actual written references to Kora in Hell are disparaging, and in a personal letter to David Ignatow in 1948 he reveals his embarrassment that the book is made up of "dreams" and is not "down to earth":

> I wrote some things once called Improvisations: Kora in Hell [sic]. They were wild flights of the imagination. As I look at them now I see how "romantic" they were. I feel embarrassed. I was having "dreams" at that time; I was having "ideas." (SL, 267)

The implication is, therefore, that without contact the break for freedom is "wild" and ungoverned. Only in contact could Williams have both rebellion against old forms and a governing principle for the new forms, in the same way that America could have both government and liberty:

> And yet American verse of today must have a certain quality of freedom, must be "free verse" in a sense. It must be new verse, in a new conscious form. But even more than that it must be free in that it is free to include all temperaments, all phases of our environment, physical as well as spiritual, mental and moral. It must be truly democratic, truly free for all--and yet it must be governed.[8]

Hugh Kenner says that "No poet started new lines as deliberately as Williams, or on as elusive a principle";[9] yet that principle has to do only with the contact between the artist and his cultural environment and the contact between words and the environment. According to Williams, the writer must first discern whether the experience is best expressed in a prose work or a poem, which is a decision based primarily on the experience itself. If the experience seems most suitably expressed in prose, then the chronological details shape the work itself--and this is perhaps why Williams' fiction seems particularly simplistic. In his poems, however, Williams attempts to allow the language itself to determine the diction and syntax of the poem, without manipulating that language to suit a given form: "Poetry has to satisfy before all else the word. It is the words that have primary place in a line and in a poem, which is an arrangement, an invention of lines, if possible, anew."[10] There is, then, a "structural" necessity in the creation of a poem, even though that necessity may not be obvious to the reader of the finished product.

In I Wanted to Write a Poem (1958) Williams, looking back at his writing after Al Que Quiere! (1917), concludes, "From this time on you can see the struggle to get a form without deforming the language" (IWWP, 23). In Williams' view the culture is contained in the language--in the words that are of the things of the place and the things of the place, in the sound of the spoken word, and in the grammar of the words in action. Of primary concern to Williams is that the grammar of the spoken words should not be manipulated by the poet to fit a particular form. In prose fiction, then, the writer need only use the language of his culture--the language of the place that is being expressed; the form is determined more by the experience than the language itself. In poetry, however, the actual line endings are, for Williams, expressions of two aspects of language--the tactile and the verbal.[11]

Paul Mariani's contention that "Speech Rhythms," an essay written before 1914,[12] shows Williams' early awareness of the importance of the spoken word, is well taken; after Poems (1909), Williams is deeply concerned about using only the language that he hears spoken around him.[13] But Williams, in his early attention to the contact between language and the place in which it is bred, reveals a deeper concern for the tactile qualities of words, their denotative and connotative values within the locality, than for their sound qualities in speech. Only in the later poems does the actual sound of the spoken words determine line endings.

In some of the early poems written under the influence of the contact theory, Williams seems most concerned that form, particularly line endings, should reveal the ability of words to be things in themselves. As J. Hillis Miller points out, in Spring and All (1923) Williams often ends lines with articles, prepositions, adjectives, or conjunctions, so that the full impact of the word as thing is felt in the imagination of the reader:[14] "The sunlight in a/ yellow plaque upon the/ varnished floor" (SA, 109).

Elsewhere, by using line breaks to shift perspective, Williams emphasizes the ability of words to create a sense of perception. In one poem the reader is taken on a ride in Williams' car, and Williams states, "I saw a girl with one leg/ over the rail of a balcony" (SA, 120). The reader must make a shift in perspective between the prosaic function of the words and their function in the poem; the image of "a girl with one leg" is set in opposition to the actual scene, and the discrepancy between the two is so startling that the scene itself becomes vivid. Line endings, far from being arbitrary or free, perform the specific function of focusing and enhancing the reader's perception.

But perhaps the most striking aspect of the two volumes of poems published in the 1920s, Spring and All (1923) and The Descent of

Winter (1928), is the conjunction of prose and poetry within a single work. Spring and All is the more formally integrated of these two works because in it poetry and prose complement one another and together celebrate the imagination. Spring and All is unified thematically whereas The Descent of Winter as a whole is unified only in that its form is somewhat like a journal, with some entries in prose and some as poems; yet this journalistic form attests to Williams' desire to stay in contact with the immediate conditions, to express that with which he is in contact while he is in contact with it, as in his entry for "10/9," when ". . . there's a little blackboy/ in a doorway/ scratching his wrists" (DW, 236). Or the entry for the following day, in which the poem itself is what distinguishes this day, "October tenth/ 1927," from any other "Monday," and that particular day contains or is the limitation of the poem itself:

Monday
        the canna flaunts
its crimson head

crimson lying folded
crisply down upon

          the invisible

darkly crimson heart
of this poor yard

the grass is long

          October tenth

1927 (DW, 236)

But while the poem as a whole is contained by the day itself, the lines, and their placement upon the page, are determined by Williams' own "sense" of the moment.

The desire to capture the present moment in the present tense so that it exists in a continuous present is expressed in Spring and All:

> Not to attempt, at that time, to get values on the word being used, according to presupposed measures, but to write down that which happens at that time--
>
> To perfect the ability to record at the moment when the consciousness is enlarged with the sympathies and the unity of understanding which the imagination gives, to practice skill in recording the force moving, then to know it, in the largeness of its proportions--
>
> It is the presence of a
>
> This is not "fit" but a unification of experience. (SA, 120)

Williams says nearly thirty years later in "The Desert Music" that it is the poet's "skill sometimes to record it" (PB, 120) that distinguishes the work, and it had been Williams' determination to deal with the immediate that had led him to be a poet rather than a painter because "the articulate art of poetry gave a more immediate opportunity for the attack" (IWWP, 3).

Williams' prose of this period of the 1920s and early 1930s, particularly The Great American Novel (1923), the journal written between the summer of 1923 and the summer of 1924 and published as Rome in 1978, and A Novelette (1932), often becomes, like the prose of Spring and All, commentary upon what is being created while it is being created. Steven Ross Loevy comments that Rome "documents Williams inhabiting his world in the present moment. It is not merely his means of contact. The text is that contact. . . ."[15] And Loevy's comments are true of the two works that purport to be fiction as well.

Taken to its extreme, contact with the immediate world means being aware of the time in which the work itself is being written--the act of writing and what is occurring while the writer is writing become incorporated into the work itself, as in The Great American Novel, which

Webster Schott says contains "a commentary on its own construction";[16] it is about the novelist writing the novel that is The Great American Novel. Williams begins by saying that "Everything exists from the beginning," and that ". . . if there is to be a novel one must begin somewhere" (GAN, 158). One chapter ends with the writer/narrator's recognition that he is married to words, and that he has, in his mind, finished the work:

> He went in to his wife with exalted mind, his breath coming in pleasant surges. I come to tell you that the book is finished.
>
> I have added a new chapter to the art of writing. I feel sincerely that all they say of me is true, that I am truly a great man and a great poet.
>
> What did you say, dear, I have been asleep? (GAN, 167)

These puns and convolutions are clever; yet ultimately the novel is merely solipsistic--turning back on itself instead of making any real contact with anything outside itself. This solipsism is evident again in A Novelette when Williams comments on the technique he had used in writing the passage he had just written:

> I could not do better because when the thing was in my mind clearly I simply could not find the minute to put it down. The dullness of this chapter is due to the difficulty.
>
> It is bad merely because I was not able to do it differently. Therefore it remains actually the thing that it is. And this is exactly what I mean and could not be said more clearly. (Nov, 293)

Referring to the works in Imaginations, Ann Parsons says that they express what John Dewey calls "the process of discovery, not its record."[17] But Williams is far more successful in voicing this process in his poetry than in his fiction. In the poetry, he focuses on things and events outside of himself, and he expresses the process of discovering those things. But in his fiction, when he presents the process of writing what is being written, he remains self-conscious, as in The Great American

Novel and A Novelette. However, even when Williams turns his view outward towards the world he inhabits, he fails, in his fiction, to find a form that is anything more than realism.

As Donald M. Kartiganer points out, "The literature of process is, of course, a commitment to realism--in its subject matter, in its apparent artlessness, even in its massive accumulation."[18] But Williams is attempting to get beyond realism, to reality itself, and in this he fails because the simple, narrative presentation of events as they occur or have occurred in no way captures, in form, the essence of those occurrences; it is a copy or a re-creation, not a creation. In fact, Williams' fiction is so closely tied to actual events that in 1926 "The Five Dollar Guy," a story by Williams published in New Masses,[19] was the subject of a legal suit that was eventually settled out of court. He had forgotten to change the names in a story about a woman friend who told him she had been propositioned by an oil company executive. Williams even went so far as to mention the name of the oil company.

At most, Williams usually maintains only a fine line between fact and fiction, and between the chronology of actual events and the chronology of his narratives. The Columbus chapter of In the American Grain, one of the few times that Williams does change the chronology, is perhaps Williams' most successful attempt at presenting the actual character, in this case Columbus. James Breslin indicates that the ". . . reversal of chronology creates the impression that, as we move through the chapter, we are stripping away the superficial layers of Columbus's personality, until we arrive at his heroic core."[20] But Williams, in his fiction, seldom offers the essence of that which he depicts; he offers only a chronological re-creation of events.

In discussing the relationship between the history of his wife's family and the plot of White Mule (1937), the first part of the Stecher trilogy, Williams states the opinion that the work is "invented" even though he had done all he could not to distort the actual history:

> Of course the story's invented. The principal characters in it are taken more or less from life and the incidents are, in the main, accounts I have heard of past happenings but all the detail is my own. Some of the conversation was put down verbatim from things said to me by my patients. I tried in every way not to distort anything of this, never to mold to my purposes but rather to use such a manner of writing that anything I heard would be naturally a part of it.[21]

The simple verbatim transcription of dialogue from the present in what is essentially the history of a family is not, however, enough to bring the work alive, though the Stecher Trilogy is successful as literary realism.

Williams' conversations and contacts with his working-class patients are the basis of most of his short stories, many of which were written in the 1930s, when he wrote almost no poetry, and are published in two volumes appropriately titled The Knife of the Times (1932) and Life along the Passaic River (1938). Williams said later that poetry was not suitable for the expression of this period of American life, and that ". . . the materials and the temporal situation dictated the terms" (SE, 300); nor did he feel that the novel would be appropriate to express that time in the life along the Passaic River, at least not as he saw it in his brief encounters with his patients:

> Why the short story? Not for a sales article but as I had conceived them. The briefness of their chronicles, its brokenness and heterogeneity--isolation, color. A novel was unthinkable.
>
> And so the very style of the stories themselves. (SE, 300)

Many of these stories, like the novel, A Voyage to Pagany, and even the long poem, Paterson, have as their protagonist a medical doctor; many others Williams had learned from his patients, though a doctor does not appear in the stories themselves. Perhaps somewhat unfairly, Louis Simpson states that ". . . as for form, a doctor's appointments have a beginning and an end";[22] yet the stories do contain what Williams could learn about these people during the time allotted for their appointments, and the frame of each story is basically established by the limitations of the doctor/patient relationship. Only as a group, fragments held together by their contact with the culture and Williams' place in it, are the stories collected in The Farmer's Daughters (1961) in any way unique in terms of structure. Together, the stories might be seen as the embodiment of Williams' contact with his patients, and they continued to embody that contact for as long as Williams himself continued to live that life. But it cannot be said that, in individual stories, Williams contributed to the development of the genre.

Williams' major contributions to form are, not surprisingly, in his poems, which are never in forms that could be considered conventional. Paterson, particularly, with its use of all forms of language, its "new measure," and its unfinished and perhaps open structure, designed to embody the essence of Paterson, New Jersey, changes the nature of poetic form. In its very name Paterson attempts to be that place, and in turn that place is, as the third book's epigraph, taken from George Santayana's The Last Puritan, indicates, "a second body for the human mind, a second organism, more rational, permanent and decorative than the animal organism of flesh and bone; a work of natural yet moral art, where the soul sets up her trophies of action and instruments of pleasure" (P, 94). Therefore, because Paterson is the "radiant gist" of all that Williams knows of Paterson, New Jersey, and because all three are living entities, it seems inevitable that the poem should continue to grow as long as Williams was alive, as it did, even though he had planned it to be only four books.

Kartiganer uses Paterson to illustrate his ideas about the writer's attempt "to discover the work of art in the process of coming into being."[23] He says that, in this "literature of process," "The writer seeks a closer identity of art with life; he seems to commit himself to the obviously impossible task of duplicating the constant movement of nature, of shattering the discrepancies between the intensity of raw experience and its transformation into verbal art."[24] Kartiganer explains that the work derived from that experience does not have a pre-determined form, but responds to "the very shape of the concrete encounter," and is, "in a real sense, subservient to that encounter" so "convention, in its usual meaning, is eliminated from art."[25] In this relationship of form and content, what Kartiganer calls the "literature of process" is like the literature of organic form in which, as Denise Levertov points out, the interaction between form and content "is discoverable only in the work, not before it."[26]

Despite lapses into propaganda about Social Credit, Paterson is, as Kartiganer points out, "among the most successful process poems," not only because it grew while Williams' knowledge of Paterson grew, but also because of the aspects of language out of which the form developed: "A brilliant pastiche of lyric, historical document, statistical tables, newspaper clippings, letters, with even the shadows of Blakean giants lumbering among the fragments--Paterson is clearly the poem wrenching itself into form."[27] In Paterson the point of view seems to be directed inward and outward simultaneously because the character, Paterson, has a multiplicity of identities, including that of the city, the doctor/poet himself, and the poem itself; yet Paterson has an identity of its own that is *Paterson*, and that identity is gained from contact with the essence of the city, not from relating the history of the city in chronological order.

As in "To a Dog Injured in the Street," in which the identities of the dog and the person viewing the dog seem to merge so that the perspective created by the work is both outward and inward, the perspective in *Paterson*, as in "The Desert Music," is both outward towards the place and inward towards the creation of the work itself--"to tell/ what subsequently I saw and heard" and also "to place myself (in/ my nature) beside nature" and to "lay myself down" (*PB*, 110)--man, place, and work of art are in contact. *Paterson* has a form which, because the city is in the process of being, must itself be in a continual process of development; it is, as Kartiganer says all poetry of process must be, "always the work in progress" which "must never be completed,"[28] but, more important, it is formed from language as it is found in Paterson--in those documents and letters that are included in the poem, and in the rhythm of the spoken language.

In the second book of *Paterson* Williams writes a few lines in a form that would predominate in the fifth book and in many of the poems collected in *Pictures from Brueghel* (1962). In this passage the line is broken into three segments--each segment of a variable length, depending on the phrasing of the spoken American language:

The descent beckons
as the ascent beckoned
Memory is a kind
of accomplishment
a sort of renewal
even
an initiation, since the spaces it open are new
places
inhabited by hordes
heretofore unrealized,
of new kinds--
since their movements
are towards new objectives
(even though formerly they were abandoned)
(P, 77-78)

In this "variable foot," as he began to call it, Williams saw the possibility of a form that is based on the American language, and that is truly modern and truly American because it is neither fixed nor free but governed by the actual spoken language: "If the foot itself is variable it allows order in so-called free verse. Thus the verse becomes not free at all but just simply variable, as all things in life properly are" (IWWP, 82). He believes that "the language we speak in the United States," a spoken language that he calls "the American Idiom" (Int, 101), can be used to structure lines within a poem.

Before Williams recognized the possibility of a "variable foot" the spoken American language had not been used by him as a way to find poetic structure; yet his desire to find the basis of form in the spoken language is evident in his attitude toward Pound's use of "the American idiom." In 1931 Williams applauded Pound's use of contemporary speech, but condemned his attempts to fit that speech into traditional forms: "Pound does very definitely intend a modern speech--but wishes to save the excellences (well-worked-out forms) of the old, so he leans to it overmuch" (SE, 107). Consequently, according to Williams, Pound's line is "classic adaptation, no more" (SL, 132), though Williams himself calls Pound "the first user of the American idiom in our day."[29]

The implication is, therefore, that it is not enough merely to use the spoken language in poems, but that the spoken language must be the basis of the metrical pattern of the poems themselves. Williams began to see that he had found a new order that could be used to give form to works other than Paterson: "There are elisions but the natural order of speech is maintained, a contemporary speech which does not lean on the conventions of past usage and so discover an order of its own which the poet seeks to fit into a pattern."[30] In American speech patterns Williams sees a way to give form that is American both in the sense that is ideologically liberal--not imposed upon the language but derived from the language itself--and in the sense that it comes from the American environment:

> This is the first essential, to discover a new metrical pattern among the speech characters of the day . . . comparable but not derived from the characters of past speech. For each speech must have somewhere in it that quality corresponding to the potential greatness of the environment which engendered it.[31]

This attempt to find a new metrical pattern is not a departure from the contact theory, merely a change in emphasis regarding which aspect of language should be the basis of the organizational principle of a poem. The American language had always been an important element in determining form in Williams' poems:

> Free verse was not the answer. From the beginning I knew that the American language must shape the pattern; later I rejected the word language and spoke of the American idiom--this was a better word than language, less academic, more identified with speech. (IWWP, 65)

The change is from an emphasis on the words' relationship to their referents, to an emphasis on the prosody of the spoken language.

In a letter to Louis Zukofsky in 1928, Williams is very definite about his attention to visual images, but he also recognizes that if sound is to be important in a modern poem, it cannot be used in the same metrical patterns as it had been in the past: "Eyes have always stood first in the poet's equipment. If you are mostly ear--a newer rhythm must come in more strongly than has been the case so far. Yet I am willing to grant--to listen" (SL, 102). By the end of the thirties, Williams wants to "Damn the bastards for saying you can't mix auditory and visual standards in poetry" (SL, 176). In works such as "Pictures from Brueghel" Williams ends lines at times when the visual image is incomplete, as he had in the past, but he is consistent in his use of triadic forms that he believes are part of the American speech pattern. His poem about Brueghel's "The Corn Harvest" is typical in this respect:

Summer!
the painting is organized
about a young

reaper enjoying his
noonday rest
completely

relaxed
from his morning labors
sprawled

in fact sleeping
unbuttoned
on his back
(PB, 9)

It is difficult to determine which aspect of language, the visual or the verbal, determines the shape of the poems in Pictures from Brueghel that were written in triadic, relative or variable measure, and the only explanation provided comes from Charles Olson, whose essay

"Projective Verse" is quoted by Williams in his autobiography. Olson himself admits that he puts it "badly," but he attempts to express the integration of the inner voice, the gist of the matter at hand, and the vocalization of that gist, so that the actual line is the unification of these two voices: "the HEAD, by way of the EAR, to the SYLLABLE/ the HEART, by way of the BREATH, to the LINE" (A, 331). As Denise Levertov explains, the first half of this equation seems to relate to the choice of the word itself, apart from rhythmical concerns but focusing instead on meaning, and the second part concerns the measure of the line itself:

> Head (intellect) and ear (sensuous instinct) lead to syllable, which has intrinsic meaning but has not rhythm. It is when heart (emotion, feeling) influence the operation of breath (process) that we are led to the line (the phrase, the rhythmic, emotive grouping of syllables). Of course a single word too, though, can be tonally charged with feeling--and as soon as we get a single word of two syllables, we have the emotive force of rhythm.[32]

Perhaps the most interesting and useful aspect of Williams' view of measure is in its relation to musical measure, in which each note, like each syllable in Williams' measure, is not of equal value--the number of notes or syllables within a measure is variable, although each measure is of equal time sequence. The change constitutes what Williams calls "a revolution in the line," a new way of measuring the line, "a way to learning" new possibilities of the line itself, which has been "blocked by rigid misconceptions of what the poetic line is, the old grill as before a prison window, the new, the grill is gone."[33] In Williams' "new measure" the line becomes like a bar in music, in which various numbers of notes can be within a bar.[34] Williams' line is determined by the timing or the breath of the spoken word and, as Charles Doyle points out, ". . . there is little difference between the 'variable foot' and Charles

Olson's conception of a 'breath unit' or 'cadence unit.'"[35]

The consequence of the new measure is that scansion, "the rule of counted syllables, in which all poems have been written hitherto," is no longer possible because "the beat, that is the measure," proceeds without concern for syllables; instead of concerning themselves with the counted syllables, both poet and reader must focus on the measure of the "musical pace," "the tune which the lines (not necessarily the words) make in our ears" (SL, 325-26). Thus the poetic "foot," which is based upon "old-time rigidities" (SL, 136), is replaced by a measure relating to the rhythm of the spoken language of America. For Williams, as for Olson, the breath pattern of the spoken phrases, which indicates the emotional state of the speaker, becomes the basic unit of measurement, though the measure itself can only be determined as it is being expressed:

> The measure is an inevitability, an unavoidable accessory after the fact. If one move, if one run, if one seize up a material --it cannot avoid having a measure, it cannot avoid a movement which clings to it--as the movement of a horse becomes part of the rider also-- (SE, 108)

American prosody, then, should reflect the changes that have occurred in the English language since its arrival in America--differences "in both word use and inflection" brought about by time and the new environment. It is because "The pace of American is entirely different from the pace of English,"[36] that ". . . the prosody of English does not apply to American"[37]--a new prosody based on the language of America should be the inevitable consequence of using the American language, but such was not the case:

> We've got to know that we have to invent for ourselves as we are in the process of inventing, whether we like it or not, a new prosody based on a present-day world, and real in a

> present-day world in which the English prosody can never be for us or the world. . . . Men like Eliot and Pound and many lesser examples have run away from the elementary necessity for differentiating the two prosodies. They never got to know the problem. They avoided it. (SL, 269-70)

Again, Williams sees the form of the poem, part of which is in the measure itself, as an outgrowth of the experience from which the poem is derived--in this case the experience of the sound of the American language itself--and he says that this contact between the poet and the spoken language of his culture has always played a part in determining poetic form: "But the dialect is the mobile phase, the changing phase, the productive phase--as their languages were to Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dante, Rabelais in their day" (SE, 291).

Unfortunately, however, Williams sees the distinction between the relative measure of American speech and the fixed measure of English as further proof that the American language is "a modern language facing an old,"[38] so that forms based on the American language are also modern, and that English, and prosody based on the sound of English, are of the past. The relativity of the prosody of American speech is, for Williams, an expression of the scientific relativity of the modern world itself: "You should find a variable measure for the fixed measure; for man and the poet must keep pace with this world."[39] For Williams, the American language itself originates from a "recent historical background--not in the deep past but the immediate present."[40] Through historical accident, therefore, American poets have been given the opportunity to use this new measure, whereas English poets must use a prosody that is their own but which has been used for centuries, and which, because it is a fixed measure, is not a modern measure.

For Williams the American language belongs to a new culture and a new land, and it is a language in a period of birth and growth; English, on the other hand, is seen as static and unchanging--a literary language found only in old books. English is the language of the past kept in the past by the sheer bulk of literary precedents, and "A variable foot is aimed right at the bowels of English verse."[41] English literary tradition means "rigidity" and "established rules" set in another place and time. These rules, which may once have related to the culture in which they were set, are not a part of modern culture, particularly not the culture of America:

> All monistic theories, as they apply to art, are absurd in our day. This is especially true of a theory of arrest, the fixed notion of English prosody, highlighted by sixteenth-century preeminence, unrelated to social, economic, and political variants, as the standard, or even a standard, of measurement for us now. (ARI, 224)

From this point of view, poets who write poems in traditional metrical patterns refuse to enter the new world:

> They cannot see that poems cannot any longer be made following a Euclidian measure, "beautiful" as this may make them. The very grounds for our beliefs have altered. We do not live that way any more; nothing in our lives, at bottom, is ordered according to that measure; our social concepts, our schools, our very religious ideas, certainly our understanding of mathematics are greatly altered. Were we called upon to go back to what we believed in the past we should be lost. Only the construction of our poems--and at best the construction of a poem must engage the tips of our intellectual awareness--is left shamefully to the past.
>
> A relative order is operative elsewhere in our lives. Even the divorce laws recognize that. Are we so stupid that we can't see that the same things apply to the construction of modern verse, to an art which hopes to engage the attention of a modern world? (SE, 337-38)

Poets and poetry are subject to the same forces that are present everywhere in the world, and they cannot ignore changes that take place around them--in contact with that world, they incorporate those changes:

> How can we accept Einstein's theory of relativity, affecting our very conception of the heavens above us of which poets write so much, without incorporating its essential fact--the relativity of measurements into our own category of activity: the poem. Do we think we stand outside the universe? Or that the Church of England does? Relativity applies to everything, like love, if it applies to anything in the world. (SE, 283)

In Einstein's theory Williams finds scientific proof of the validity of theories on which the foundations of the American social and political systems, as Thomas Jefferson envisaged them, were based--that the truth itself is relative, based upon contact with the immediate situation. Therefore, in poetry, the only way to maintain order within this change is to maintain contact with the immediate conditions, and to employ a "variable foot."

But even the relative measure is not Williams' ultimate answer concerning the question of poetic form. Paul Mariani says, without indicating where these new forms are to be found in Williams' work, that "Even before the younger poets had begun to use his step-down innovations in the line for their own uses, then, the old master had moved beyond those to new constructs."[42] But as early as Kora in Hell (1920), Williams had recognized that "the field of his environment" would change, and force him to take a "new direction" in order to stay in contact with it (KH, 65). Even this direction, however, is temporary, as every new direction must be. As time passes, the world of here and now is "doomed to suffer the same annihilation" as the world of the past had suffered (SA, 90). For Williams, the measure and the form that express the environment as it is today will not express that same environment tomorrow: "a new measure!/ Soon lost" (PB, 167).

Williams himself had seen his relative measure, from its beginning, simply as part of a continuous attempt to maintain contact with a changing world:

> I have accordingly made a few experiments which will appear in a new book shortly. What I want to emphasize is that I do not consider anything I have put down there as final. There will be other experiments but all will be directed toward the discovery of a new measure, I repeat, a new measure by which may be ordered our poems as well as our lives. (SE, 340)

The form of the poem, then, is governed by the same forces that govern life in the contemporary world, its philosophical underpinnings, and the poet must maintain constant contact with that world.

CONCLUSION

> Men have always tried to bridge the gap between assumption and proof by the presentation of the theory, the theorem; an assumption in interim taken to be so true that we may get to work whereas, in the various axioms on which all mathematics is based, there may never be any proof at all. Yet we must make the choice between no mathematics at all or the assumption that it is true until it is proven false. (EK, 53)

> In spite of the scope and dignity of the great historic philosophic systems, an artist may be instinctively repelled by the constraint imposed by acceptance of any system. If the important thing is "not this or that system but some system," why not accept, with Shakespeare, the free and varied system of nature itself as that works and moves in experience in many and diverse organizations of value? As compared with the movement and change of nature, the form that "reason" is said to prescribe may be that of a particular tradition which is a premature and one-sided synthesis in terms of a single and narrow aspect of experience. Art that is faithful to the many potentialities of organization, centering about a variety of interests and purposes, that nature offers--as was that of Shakespeare--may have not only a fullness but a wholeness and sanity absent from a philosophy of enclosure, transcendence, and fixity.
>
> --John Dewey, Art as Experience (p. 321)

There is a certain irony about wanting, idealistically, never to be trapped by ideals. Williams expresses a theory that is ostensibly against inflexible rules and that has as its basic tenet a concern for the changing, immediate world; yet even such a theory is limited and limiting. The very existence of works which were produced outside the boundaries of Williams' theory by expatriate Americans such as Henry James, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein, as well as Pound and Eliot, reveals inadequacies of Williams' theory; Williams' own work is evidence that it is possible to work from within the bounds of the contact theory, but those bounds are not the limitations of art itself. Despite his call for liberty, his criticisms of those artists who express an affinity for values that he does not share, or who use conventional forms, reveal Williams' own inflexibility. His use of political jargon and clichés make it difficult to sympathize with him even when he argues a point that might be, in its own right, acceptable; he often damages his own argument by making it chauvinistic. Although, as a result of the contact theory, Williams is often able to present his direct impressions of the American environment in his poetry, in his theory he never satisfactorily distinguishes his own idealistic impression of America from America itself, and so when he expounds American ideology he never recognizes that he is doing more than revealing the place itself.

But despite Williams' advocacy of American ideology, the contact theory over-emphasizes the importance of the actual world to art. Environment does play a part in determining culture, and even when ideology and language are transported from one place to another, they are shaped by the new environment. But culture is not determined strictly by locality, and the actual world is not the only indication of the culture; ideas are more important to culture than Williams recognizes. Although the expression of actual events and of the artist's own experiences does seem crucial to the expression of any culture, to deny the possibility that modern art might be set in other times and other places is to deny many of the world's masterpieces, including Pound's Cantos; it is perhaps to deny the existence of the whole genre of historical fiction, not to mention science fiction. Art, then, cannot be said to be in as direct contact with the artist's time and place as Williams' theory would have it.

Ironically, American culture itself might be more aptly expressed through ideas than through actual experience, because it is, in the minds of its own people as well as the people of other cultures, a symbol of liberty. In fact, it was an idea before it was a place. According to Henry Miller, himself an expatriate for much of his life, the only America that exists is an idea with which no one can make physical contact:

> It is best to keep America just like that, always in the background, a sort of picture post card which you look at in a weak moment. Like that, you imagine it's always there waiting for you, unchanged, unspoiled, a big patriotic open space with cows and sheep and tenderhearted men ready to bugger everything in sight, man, woman or beast. It doesn't exist, America. It's a name you give to an abstract idea.[1]

Ironically, then, America is perhaps the one nation to which Williams' contact theory, in terms of the relationship between place and culture, is least applicable, and it might also be said that it is the one nation whose citizens living in other countries might most easily express the cultural values.

Despite his own argument that contact with actual conditions at hand is an essential part of the American ideology, Williams himself maintains a thoroughly idealistic impression of his nation; the very thought that democracy itself, not the actual government, should be advocated leads to and is evidence of this idealistic view of America. He purports, especially when dealing with historical figures, to present only the words of those figures themselves and the historical documents of their time, but ultimately his theory is too much an advocacy of American ideology, and in this sense even Pound's comments about the actual workings of American elections reveal a more direct contact than is found in Williams' attitude towards America.

Williams' impressions of America, then, cannot be said to bear much relation to the actual America. There is little left of what might be considered a native American heritage, and in fact the cultures of American Indians were destroyed by willful acts of genocide so that the European society could be established. Despite Williams' wishes, the background of America is not America, but Europe. As even John Dewey admits, almost all American theories and ideas "are not creations de novo. They have their roots in British and European thought."[2] The American Revolution, too, is the culmination of a gradual process, much of which took place in Europe. The European tradition, in philosophy, politics, science, and art, is part of the American heritage. What Williams makes seem almost spontaneous was, as Einstein recognizes, evolutionary: "Most objects are gained by graduate steps: for example, the suppression of absolute monarchy by democracy."[3] Nor is America the only democratic nation in the world, though Williams might lead us to believe that it is.

As Dewey again points out, even American pragmatism is based on European philosophy.[4] But the value of the pragmatic view of knowledge is itself questionable, as is Williams' view that artists are essentially pragmatists. To view the most important kind of knowledge as that which is found through contact is to remain ignorant of all that lies outside one's own personal experience. While it cannot be denied that some artists do work strictly out of their own experiences, it cannot be said that all art is based upon the artist's own experience, nor can it be said that art which is highly allusive or which deals with an event outside the artist's own cultural milieu is ill-founded. It might be said more strictly that whatever an American artist creates comes from his own perspective, which is part of the cultural perspective, and must be incorporated into one's interpretation of American culture as a whole; Eliot's perspective, and Eliot's art, must then be considered as much a part of American culture as anything produced by Williams. The strong conservative element in American literature, and in American culture, cannot be denied.

But perhaps most important, art need not express only ideas derived from events; it can be intellectual in the sense that an "objective correlative" can be found to express an idea or an emotion. The artist need not deny his own will and his own personality and succumb to the world in which he finds himself. It is not necessarily desirable, if even possible, that an artist should forget everything he knows, not only about the world, but about his craft as well. The contact theory is, in its denial of the artist's will, its attitude towards knowledge, and its denial of tradition, a treatise against craft in art, and a naive advocacy of spontaneous creativity.

The contact theory's technical aspects, however, do offer useful considerations for artists and critics both. Williams' concern that the language of contemporary American literature should be distinct from the language of British poets of the past, John Donne, for example, is valid, though the bond of language between America and England, especially written language, can be broken only through time, if at all. Eliot's warning to writers not to become subjugated to colloquial speech is well taken, but changes in the language should be taken into consideration by writers because words that have been replaced by other more contemporary language become anachronistic.

The elimination of figurative language from literature, too, seems absurd. But the aim of imagery is clarity, not obscurity, so where a word itself can be more expressive than a metaphor or a simile, the word is sufficient. Belief in the power of words to be things themselves when they are in contact with a referent does allow a more metonymical approach to literature by the writer.

In the same way that words can become anachronisms, forms also lose their ability to express cultural values--formal changes seem as necessary and inevitable as changes in the language and in the culture itself; however, innovations brought about by Pound's attempts to introduce Japanese and Chinese forms into English and American literature are evidence that forms are transferable from one culture to another. The form itself becomes new when it is adapted to a different culture than the one in which it originated--it becomes possible for that form to become a part of the culture into which it has been placed. Contrary to Williams' opinion, it is possible for forms to differ in the sense that a Wordsworth sonnet differs from a Shakespearean sonnet, and that a sonnet by e. e. cummings is distinct from either. But such evolutionary change is, in Williams' view, neither a modern nor an American method, and he insists that major breakthroughs are revolutionary, not evolutionary.

Unfortunately when Williams, in his effort to promote and express his own theory, set his views in opposition to those of Eliot, he set America and the present against Europe and the past as well. A fundamental problem with Williams' theory is that while he is saying that art is the expression of the culture from which it is derived, he indicates that the only way to write modern poetry is to write American poetry, and American poetry cannot be confined in conventional forms. Williams has the self-righteous opinion that American ideology, aside from being modern, is liberal and morally correct, so he can tolerate nothing else and he cannot understand why others would not accept the American way.

When Williams draws the analogy between the artist's attempt to reveal his culture and the American ideology, and between the American view of knowledge and the kind of knowledge gained by the artist, he unwisely implies that all great art has been based on American ideology; however, much has been produced in undemocratic societies and by artists who do not share Williams' belief in democracy. Great artists, according to Williams, have always stayed in contact with the immediate world, and have denied social and literary conventions in order to express their own experience of that world. Williams does not consider that, unlike America, some societies and cultures might be based upon traditional or conventional standards that are not flexible, despite the theory of relativity, or that some cultures may evolve gradually rather than through revolutionary change. In these cases the artist, if he were to express the contemporary sensibility of his culture, would not express an American sensibility. To say that this culture is somehow less modern than or not as good as American culture is to engage in the same elitism as that of which Williams accuses Eliot, and the attempt to create modern (thereby American) forms in this culture is to deny its cultural autonomy --it is to judge the world by American standards.

Despite his arguments for cultural relativism, Williams assumes that there is only one modern world, the American world; he assumes that history and human development have moved towards this most advanced state, which is America, whereas America is only one of perhaps an unlimited number of possible historical conditions. British poets such as Philip Larkin or Ted Hughes can express a modern British sensibility without adopting a revolutionary American stance. Williams' stereotyping of America as the new world and Europe, particularly Britain, as the past, while it may have been a useful tool in creating his argument, now seems trite.

Williams' rebellious stance is perhaps the most tiresome aspect of his theorizing, and the energy used in his diatribes against Eliot, Europe, the past, and oppression might better have been spent working toward his own goals. But even these attacks are part of the American nature of the contact theory. In much the same argument as is presented by Philip Rahv in his "paleface"/"redskin" analogy, R. W. B. Lewis contends that the dialogue between Americans who view the "authentic American" as "a figure of heroic innocences and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history" and those who look to Europe as the centre of western civilization, has always been a part of America.[5] The "authentic" American nature of Williams' theory is, therefore, its limitation as a critical tool; yet Williams himself had sought an American aesthetic theory. Much of the contact theory does, also, have American literary precedents, which are perhaps best exemplified by Emerson, who Lewis says "reverted time and again to the same theme: 'beware of tradition'; 'forget historical Christianity'; 'lop off all superfluity and tradition, and fall back on the nature of things.'"[6] Williams' attacks are perhaps also justified because Eliot posed a powerful threat to this outlook. Despite Williams' hopeful pronouncement in 1939 that, "The political tendency of American writing since 1930 and thirty years before has been toward a discovery of the terms of discussion and declaration in the only world it can know, that under its nose,"[7] Williams was largely neglected while Eliot was winning converts to his traditionalist cause, which is as limited in its criteria for judging literature as the contact theory is.

But the most valuable application of the contact theory was made by Williams himself, not as a critical tool, but as a guide for his own work. It is Williams' contact approach to the poem that allows for or creates the unique perspective, neither subjective no objective, described by J. Hillis Miller. In the same way that Copernicus' discoveries do not change what actually exists yet create a profound change, so Williams' discovery of contact changes the nature of his art; by seeing himself as part of the world he inhabits, by accepting the ideology of his nation, and by being in sympathetic contact with things that lie outside himself, Williams created works that are expressions of his own life and experiences while at the same time they are the expressions of his place and time. Einstein writes of the "rigidity" of a theory that ". . . is either true or false, but not modifiable,"[8] and Williams' contact theory is not modifiable if this new and dubious perspective is to be maintained: if the artist were to leave his native land and write about it from memory, then his views would be subjective; if he were to remain at home yet write without "sympathetic impulses," then his perspective would become objective.

Williams' attempts to use colloquial American language, the American idiom, and his own "continually refreshed forms," also result from his contact approach. His labors to capture the immediacy of experience in the language and form of his work can be, as Henry Willis Wells indicates, exasperating for the reader, but perhaps not as exasperating as the lack of challenge presented by poets who look to the past for their forms: "Today some poets, as John Masefield, seem to us reactionary, while others, as William Carlos Williams, exasperate certain of their readers by extreme modernity."[9] But this attachment to reality, besides being, as John Dewey points out, a part of the American philosophy that "regards the world as being in continuous formation, where there is still place for indeterminism, for the new, and for a real future,"[10] limits the possibilities of art as any theory, by definition, does. But the limitations on form in the contact theory are placed primarily on forms that already exist, not on the possibility of new ones. The lack of traditionalism in American ideology is, as Dewey understands, compensated for: "Our neglect of the traditions of the past, with whatever this negligence implies in the way of spiritual impoverishment of our life, has its compensation in the idea that the world is recommencing and being remade under our eyes."[11] Williams remained constantly challenged and stimulated by trying to stay in contact with the changing world, and he responded with new forms. Although contemporary American art has been produced outside the boundaries of the contact theory, and although Williams' own experiments with form may fail at times, works as formally unique and diverse as "The Red Wheelbarrow," Paterson, and "The Desert Music" are products of the contact approach.

Perhaps the most provocative question regarding the contact theory concerns its value to other artists. In what might be considered proof of Williams' belief that truths change at least every twenty years, Williams' ideas began to gain favor, particularly in the 1950s, as Europe, and the European traditions and conventions, were overlooked by many American writers. In Paterson Williams rejoices at the survival of his ideas since the 1920s, when he had translated Philippe Soupault's The Last Nights of Paris, a novel which must have had, for Williams, a rather ironic title:

"What has happened to Paris
since that time?
and to myself"?

A WORLD OF ART
THAT THROUGH THE YEARS HAS

SURVIVED! (P, 209)

In "The Contact Story," he welcomes the third appearance of Contact because he views the re-appearance of the magazine, particularly because it is edited by young writers who are taking over his position, as a victory for the contact approach to literature--a concern for the experiences and the language of the writer's native land--that he had envisioned in the twenties:

> The name typified a direct approach to life which typified many of the writers of the period and in America, at least, a concern with the local idiom. The American idiom dared at last to challenge Oxford English--until T. S. Eliot deserted to the older rules with his way of writing. He won an overwhelming, if short-lived, victory with his verse and threw us back on our heels for another 20 years, maybe nearer 40 years.
>
> Only today are we beginning to get our feet under us again, finally rid of the Eliot influence. Now is the time for the name Contact to appear among us again, making its way among a heap of impedimenta which clutter the path about the feet of our young writers. If they remain alert and are not taken in again by our scholars and teachers of English and our sycophant professors of English, who after all have their salaries to protect, we may in America be ready to go ahead independently again. (CIII, I [1958], 76)

Williams did, therefore, have a victory of sorts, particularly in the 1950s and 60s. The editors of Contact (San Francisco) acknowledged that their magazine was the "newest incarnation" of a magazine established nearly forty years before (CIII, 1 [1958], 79), and, ironically, young American poets began to look upon Williams as a master to be followed. In Escape from the Self: A Study in Contemporary American Poetry and

Poetics, Karl Malkoff states that the basis for "the movement from Imagism to Objectivism to Projectivism--summarized by [Charles] Olson in the term Objectism" is pinpointed by Williams in "a new relationship between the self and the world."[12] Malkoff points to Robert Duncan's assertion of the importance of the body as well as the mind in man's relationship with the universe as the key to this new relationship. But Williams had seen the possibilities of such a relationship, which begins with sensual contact.

Olson and the poets who became associated with Black Mountain College in the 1950s began to reject the belief in tradition, and tried to focus their attention on the "here" and "now." Olson, in his letters to Cid Corman regarding Origin magazine, says that he would like to see the magazine

> . . . go by spontaneous, irregular, guerilla forms;
>
> why not take this the step further it already implies, and make that the form of your MAG: make it, such a presentation, a RE ENACTMENT OF,
>
> the going reality of (approximate, shot at) THAT WHICH IS ABREAST OF US: now, here & now, not what was what was we do lament[13]

Olson fears the move "back toward tradition, and a whole series of cliché positions,"[14] which Williams had feared in the 1920s.

But Olson mistakenly believes that Pound's "RAG-BAG technique" provides the "methodological clue," while he believes that Williams "gave us the lead on the LOCAL/ OR put it that pat: EP the verb, BILL the NOUN problem. To do. And who, to do. Neither of them: WHAT."[15] But whereas Pound offers a "RAG-BAG" technique as an alternative to convention, Williams offers a way to proceed, for if there is no conventional form, what determines form so that it is not completely arbitrary? The way to proceed is, however, according to the contact theory, an American way, and those elements of Williams' attack on Eliot's Modernism that have become part of post-Modernist aesthetics must be viewed in the way that Williams devised them--as American aesthetics. Post-Modernism becomes, from this perspective, an American concept, not applicable elsewhere, if cultural relativity is to be maintained.

But Williams, even among his most ardent supporters such as Karl Shapiro, who, in In Defense of Ignorance, attacks Eliot and reveres Williams, is much more important as an artist than as a theorist. Shapiro says that ". . . it is unfortunate for him that he must engage in theory at all."[16] However, in following the example of Williams' own art, these writers might have done well to read the contact theory as well. Williams' growing popularity among American poets since the 1950s cannot be said to have produced followers of the contact theory; rather, it has produced a "school" of followers and imitators of Williams, contrary to the theory itself.[17] Hayden Carruth, in his introduction to Williams' poems in The Voice That is Great within Us: American Poetry of the Twentieth Century, says that at the time that anthology was published, in 1970, Williams was "probably the most widely read, and certainly the most widely imitated, of all American poets."[18] Williams himself would have expected, and even hoped, to be "annihilated" in the search for new forms and new theories, but his own work has become part of the evolutionary process of American literature. More important than the "rules" of the contact theory itself is the encouragement it offers those poets who, in the spirit of Whitman and Williams, develop their own approach to the poem.

NOTES

Introduction

[1] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," English Institute Essays: 1947 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), 57-58.

[2] (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971), p. 387.

[3] Exiles Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s, rev. ed. (New York: Viking, 1951), p. 27.

[4] Williams in conversation with John C. Thirlwall. "Appendix IV" of Thirlwall's essay "William Carlos Williams's Paterson," in New Directions 17 (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. 253.

[5] Three on the Tower: The Lives and Works of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and William Carlos Williams (New York: William Morrow, 1975), p. 259.

[6] "A Failure of Contact: William Carlos Williams on America," Emory University Quarterly, 20 (1964), 248.

[7] "William Carlos Williams 1883-1963," in William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage, ed. Charles Doyle (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 361.

[8] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 51.

[9] William Carlos Williams: Poet from Jersey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975), p. 243.

[10] Skyscraper Primitives: Dada and the American Avant-Garde, 1910-1925 (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), p. 84. See also Mike Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 31. Charles Doyle, in his introduction to William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage (London, Boston, and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 44, perpetuates the idea of a connection between contact and flying:

> McAlmon had been a flyer on the West Coast of the United States and associate editor of an aviation magazine, the 'Ace'. Greatly exhilarated by flying, he also felt deeply each renewed contact with the earth. In addition to the usual significance given to the title of the Williams-McAlmon 'Contact' it is worth noting the command word 'Contact!' used in the early days of flight for starting the aircraft's engine, and suggesting electrical connections and, of course, flight.

[11] William Carlos Williams (Norfolk, Conn.: New Directions, 1950), p. 188.

[12] Adrift among Geniuses: Robert McAlmon, Writer and Publisher of the Twenties (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1975), p. 31.

[13] See Bram Dijkstra, Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams: The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969), and Dijkstra's introduction to ARI.

[14] Troubadour: An Autobiography (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1925), p. 243.

[15] Williams, "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," The Poetry Journal, 8:1 (Nov., 1917), 34.

[16] Williams, "Gloria," Others, 5:6 (July, 1919), 3.

[17] See Smoller, pp. 6-7, and Williams' autobiography, pp. 176-77, regarding McAlmon's marriage to Winifred Ellerman, who wrote under the pseudonym, Bryher.

[18] Robert E. Knoll, in his introduction to McAlmon and the Lost Generation: A Self-Portrait (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 6-7.

[19] William Carlos Williams: A New World Naked (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), p. 176.

[20] Mariani, p. 696.

[21] "A Bibliography of Robert McAlmon's Published Works" is appended to Smoller, pp. 333-38.

[22] Mariani, p. 176.

[23] "Palefaces and Redskins," in Essays on Literature and Politics 1932-1972, eds. Arabel J. Porter and Andrew J. Drosin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), pp. 3-7.

[24] Cowley, p. 206.

[25] Mariani, p. 191. Williams criticizes Eliot in his prologue to KH.

[26] "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch," in The Novel Today, ed. Malcolm Bradbury (Rowman and Littlefield: Manchester University Press, 1977), p. 28.

[27] Iris Murdoch, "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," Yale Review, 49 (December 1959), 259.

[28] See Kenneth Johnson, "Eliot as Enemy: William Carlos Williams and *The Waste Land*," in *The Twenties: Fiction, Poetry, Drama*, ed. Warren French (Deland, Florida: Everett/Edwards, Inc., 1975), pp. 377-86.

[29] Williams, "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," 27.

[30] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 65-66.

[31] Mariani, p. 494.

[32] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 68.

[33] Williams, letter to Byron Vazakas, quoted in Mariani, p. 494.

[34] Williams, "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," 28.

[35] Williams, letter to Flossie Williams, 15 May 1910, in Mariani, p. 88.

[36] Williams, "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," 31.

[37] Williams, "Experimental and Formal Verse: Some Hints towards the Enjoyment of Modern Verse," *Quarterly Review of Literature*, 7:3 [1954], 175.

[38] "American Letter," *The Dial*, 70 (April, 1921), 566.

[39] *The Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975), p. 121.

[40] "William Carlos Williams' Image of America," unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Wisconsin, 1957), p. 5.

[41] (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966), p. xi.

[42] "Heaven's First Law," in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle, p. 73.

[43] Roy Harvey Pearce, *The Continuity of American Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), and R. W. B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

[44] *The Inverted Bell: Modernism and the Counterpoetics of William Carlos Williams* (Baton Rouge: Louisianna State University Press, 1974), p. xvi. Riddel's book is, deservedly, given a scathing review by Norma Procopiow in the *William Carlos Williams Newsletter* 1:1 (Fall, 1975), 12-14.

[45] Boston, 1:1 (Winter [Jan.-Mar.], 1930), 1.

[46] Mariani, p. 300.

[47] William Carlos Williams and the American Poem (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 67.

[48] (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 8-9.

[49] Miller, pp. 291 and 358.

[50] Ostrom, p. xii.

[51] Ostrom, pp. 5 and 6.

[52] Tashjian, p. 90.

[53] Tashjian, p. 84.

[54] Tashjian, p. 87.

[55] Williams, "America, Whitman, and the Art of Poetry," 29.

[56] (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. x.

[57] American Poets from the Puritans to the Present (1968; rpt. New York: Dell, 1970), p. 370.

[58] Forms of Discovery: Critical and Historical Essays on the Forms of the Short Poem in English (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1967), p. 319.

[59] Albert Einstein, in Ideas and Opinions (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), says that ". . . our notions of physical reality can never be final" (p. 266), and Richard Kostelanetz, in his preface to Esthetics Contemporary (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978), says, "Our perception of art, like our perception of reality, must continually be updated" (p. 13).

Chapter 1

[1] William Carlos Williams and the American Scene, 1920-1940 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p. 19.

[2] Notes towards the Definition of Culture ([1948]; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 120.

[3] Eliot, Notes, p. 60.

[4] Eliot, Notes, p. 113.

[5] Eliot, Notes, p. 114.

[6] Alfred North Whitehead, in Science and the Modern World: Lowell Lectures, 1925 ([1925]; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1948),

a work that Williams praises (see SL, 79), says that "the inward thoughts of a generation" are expressed in poetry and drama" (p. 76). He uses the examples of Milton's Paradise Lost, Pope's Essay on Man, Wordsworth's Excursion, and Tennyson's In Memoriam to show that great poetry expresses the "mentality" of the age in which it was created (p. 78).

[7] Ino Rossi, in People in Culture: A Survey of Cultural Anthropology (New York: Praeger, 1980), defines culture in terms very similar to those used by Williams. Rossi says: "Culture encompasses all that humans have produced to help adapt themselves to the physical environment and to one another. It includes agreed-upon principles of human coexistence (values, norms) and techniques for survival (technology)" (p. 16). But despite the relationship between culture and place, Franz Boas argues, according to Rossi, that "Geographical or environmental factors are not the determinants of culture. They are relevant only as they modify or limit existing cultures; rather culture stems largely from culture itself" (p. 48). Rossi says that for Claude Levi-Strauss, culture is an "ideational system": "Levi-Strauss views cultures as systems of shared symbols, structured in accordance with the principles governing the functioning of the human mind that generates them" (p. 59). Even among anthropologists, then, there are "two different theoretical positions" regarding culture: "the one materialistic, stressing the material factors of cultural life: the other mentalist, emphasizing the mental or ideational aspects of culture" (p. 73).

[8] Williams, quoted by Van Wyck Brooks in his introduction to The Farmers' Daughters (New York: New Directions, 1961), p. viii.

[9] ([1938]; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970).

[10] See Eliot, Notes, p. 18. Eliot believes in a hierarchy of cultures, in which ". . . we can distinguish between higher and lower cultures. . . ."

[11] Rossi, People in Culture, p. 2. Rossi says:

> Anthropologists reject ethnocentrism and uphold the principle of cultural relativism, that all customs, values, and beliefs must be understood according to the cultural standards of which they are part. They maintain that no one culture is better than any other since each is a result of a historical tradition accepted by people as their way of life. To be objective, anthropologists must divest themselves of their own cultural biases and understand a culture as it is understood by the people who live it.

[12] Viktor Shklovsky, in "Art as Technique," Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays, translated by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), says that art is useful because it brings life to the consciousness of the audience:

> Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. "If the whole complex lives of many people

> go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been." And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make the stone *stony*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensations of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. (p. 12)

John Dewey, in *Art as Experience* ([1934]; rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), expresses a similar view: "The moral function of art itself is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive" (p. 325).

[13] Williams, "The Element of Time: Advice to a Young Writer" [1934], in *Harvard Advocate Centennial Anthology*, ed. Jonathan D. Culler (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1966), p. 197.

[14] *Cubism, Stieglitz, and the Early Poetry of William Carlos Williams: The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech*, p. 96.

[15] See Ostrom, pp. 16 and 19.

[16] Williams, "A Maker," *The Little Review*, 6:4 (Aug. 1919), 38.

[17] Williams, "The Fatal Blunder," *Quarterly Review of Literature*, 2:2 (1945), 125.

[18] Williams, "The Fatal Blunder," 125.

[19] "The Fatal Blunder," 125. The passage to which Williams refers is in *Ash Wednesday*. See T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* ([1963]; rpt. London: Faber and Faber, 1974), p. 95.

[20] Eliot, *Notes*, p. 114.

[21] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," *Selected Essays*, 3rd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1951), p. 14.

[22] Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," p. 14.

[23] Williams, "Experimental and Formal Verse," 172.

[24] Williams, "From Unpublished Letters by William Carlos Williams," in *The Massachusetts Review*, 3 (Winter 1962), 296.

[25] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 54.

[26] Burke, "Heaven's First Law," in *William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Charles Doyle, p. 71.

[27] *In Defense of Reason* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1947), p. 76.

Chapter 2

[1] See Richard Wasson, "Notes on a New Sensibility," Partisan Review, 36 (1969), p. 475. Paraphrasing Thomas Pynchon, Wasson raises the question of whether or not any interpretation of history can be considered "truth." He concludes that, because we cannot know the whole "plot" of history, ". . . our interpretations of history are only fictions." Williams' own interpretation of American history, on which he bases his conception of American ideology, is only one of a number of possible fictions.

[2] See Noland.

[3] Dijkstra says that Williams "in actuality never chose to confront that world in other than its visual textures, in its surface modulations. How an artist could express that world and not be part of it, not be influenced by the ideological structures which had shaped that world, even in his negative responses to it, is a question Williams chose to ignore in his rejection of the political dimension of art" (ARI, 22-23).

[4] Letters from an American Farmer (New York: Dutton, 1912), p. 43.

[5] "The Dream of the New," in American Dreams, American Nightmares, ed. David Madden (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), p. 19.

[6] Fiedler, p. 19.

[7] The Dial, 68:6 (June, 1920), 684-88.

[8] Crèvecoeur, p. 73.

[9] See Philip Rahv, "The Cult of Experience in American Literature," in Essays on Literature and Politics 1932-1972, pp. 8-22.

[10] "The Poet," quoted in Smoller, p. 32.

[11] Thoreau, as quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman (London, Toronto, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 91.

[12] Jefferson and/or Mussolini: L'Idea Statale, Fascism as I Have Seen It (New York: Liveright, 1935), p. 108.

[13] Williams, "A Fault of Learning: Communication," Partisan Review, 10:5 (Sept.-Oct. 1943), 468.

[14] See Guy Davenport, "The Nuclear Venus: Dr. Williams' Attack upon Usura," Perspective, 5-6 (1952-53), 183-90.

[15] Townley, p. 152.

[16] "American Heroes," in William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage, ed. Charles Doyle, p. 91.

[17] Skyscraper Primitives, pp. 113-14.

[18] See Roy Harvey Pearce, The Continuity of American Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

[19] Williams, "An Essay on Leaves of Grass," in Whitman: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1962), p. 148.

[20] Cowley, p. 214.

[21] Frederick J. Hoffman et al., The Little Magazine: A History and a Bibliography (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 77.

[22] Preface to the 1962 edition of Notes towards the Definition of Culture.

[23] (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), p. ix. Iris Murdoch, in "The Sublime and the Beautiful Revisited," says that the Symbolists ("T. S. Eliot, T. E. Hulme, I. A. Richards, and others"), have "a yearning to pierce through the messy phenomenal world to some perfect and necessary form and order":

> It is not at all surprising, when we consider the matter further, to discover that the Symbolist trend is intolerant and anti-Liberal. Its fear of contingency and history is a fear of the real existing messy modern world, full of real existing messy modern persons, with individual messy modern opinions of their own. To this Hulme would oppose institutions and dogma, the presumed clarity and cleanliness of the medieval world when, to use Eliot's phrase apropos of Dante, "thought was orderly and strong and beautiful." (p. 260)

[24] Pound (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1975), p. 25.

[25] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 109.

[26] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 110.

[27] Davie, p. 96.

[28] Fiedler, p. 21.

[29] Fiedler, p. 26.

[30] Fiedler, pp. 26-27.

[31] Cubism, pp. 123-24.

Chapter 3

[1] The question of the relationship between the senses and knowledge has, as Einstein points out, always been of great concern to philosophers:

> In the evolution of philosophic thought through the centuries the following question has played a major role: what knowledge is pure thought able to supply independently of sense perception? Is there any such knowledge? If not, what precisely is the relation between our knowledge and the raw material furnished by sense impressions: An almost boundless chaos of philosophical opinions corresponds to these questions and to a few others intimately connected with them. Nevertheless there is visible in this process of relatively fruitless but heroic endeavors a systematic trend of development, namely, an increasing skepticism concerning every attempt by means of pure thought to learn something about the "objective world," about the world of "things" in contrast to the world of mere "concepts and ideas." Be it said parenthetically that, just as on the part of a real philosopher, quotation marks are used here to introduce an illegitimate concept, which the reader is asked to permit for the moment, although the concept is suspect in the eyes of the philosophical police. (p. 19)

Alfred North Whitehead says that the questions regarding the basis of knowledge are more acute in the twentieth century than at any other time because ". . . scientific theory is outrunning common sense" (p. 115), an attitude that is confirmed by Einstein's statement: "Nobody could hope ever to 'perceive directly' an atom" (p. 303). Whitehead laments the psychological distance between mind and matter. He says also that this split of mind and body is evident in philosophy, which has "on the whole emphasised mind," and in science which, at least until the twentieth century, emphasised "physical science" (pp. 192-93). Whitehead does not deny that ". . . the ideas, now in the minds of contemporary mathematicians, lie very remote from any notions which can be immediately derived by perception through the senses; unless indeed it be perception stimulated and guided by antecedent mathematical knowledge" (p. 20). Indeed, Einstein believes that the whole world can be known through mathematical concepts:

> I am convinced that we can discover by means of purely mathematical constructions the concepts and the laws connecting them with each other, which furnish the key to understanding of natural phenomena. Experience may suggest the appropriate mathematical concepts, but they most certainly cannot be deduced from it. Experience remains, of course, the sole criterion of the physical utility of a mathematical construction. But the creative principle resides in mathematics. In a certain sense, therefore, I hold it true that pure thought can grasp reality, as the ancients dreamed. (p. 274)

Although Whitehead does not deny the possibility of such abstract knowledge he, like John Dewey and Williams himself, believes that such knowledge lacks human value because it essentially ignores sense impressions. John Dewey, in Art as Experience ([1934]; rpt. New York: Capricorn Books, 1958), expresses the opinion that the most valuable human knowledge is found in the unity of body and mind, and the whole being with the environment:

> Popular psychology and much so-called scientific psychology have been pretty thoroughly infected by the idea of the separateness of mind and body. . . . It has treated mind as an independent entity which attends, purposes, cares, notices, and remembers. This change of ways of responding to the environment into an entity from which actions proceed is unfortunate because it removes mind from necessary connection with the objects and events, past, present, and future, of the environment with which responsive activities are inherently connected. Mind that bears only and accidental relation to the environment occupies a similar relation to the body. In making mind purely immaterial (isolated from the organ of doing and undergoing), the body ceases to be living and becomes a dead lump. (pp. 263-64)

[2] Williams, "A Fault of Learning: A Communication," in Partisan Review, 10:5 (Sept.-Oct., 1943), 468.

[3] See Richard Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life (New York: Knopf, 1963), and Leo Gurko, Heroes, Highbrows, and the Popular Mind ([1953]; rpt. Indianapolis and New York: Charter Books, 1962).

[4] Emerson, Nature, quoted in Matthiessen, p. 51.

[5] The only aspect of Einstein's thought to which Williams applies his own theory has to do with the theory of relativity and the changes that that theory had created in the perspectives taken in the modern world--no fixed or absolute position from which to view the world; no absolute standard of measure. Einstein himself explains, in an essay written in 1940 and entitled "The Fundaments of Theoretical Physics," now included in Ideas and Opinions (New York: Bonanza Books, 1954), that, "What we call physics comprises that group of natural sciences which base their concepts on measurements . . ." (p. 324). The relationship between the theory of relativity and the contact theory can perhaps best be summarized by saying that Williams believes his own philosophical position against absolutism and fixed standards is necessitated not only by American ideology, but by Einstein's discoveries as well. Einstein's actual theory, then, is not as important as the new mentality it creates. Alfred North Whitehead, in Science and the Modern World ([1925]; rpt. New York: New American Library, 1948), states, in regard to changes brought about by scientific developments: "The new mentality is more important even than the new science and the new technology. It has altered the metaphysical presuppositions and the imaginative contents of our minds; so that now the old stimuli provoke a new response" (p. 2). Copernicus'

discovery that the earth is not the center of the universe, and the resulting change in human perception, exemplify the psychological changes brought about by scientific developments.

[6] Einstein states, "Some physicists, among them myself, cannot believe that we must abandon, actually and forever, the idea of direct representation of physical reality in space and time; or that we must accept the view that events in nature are analogous to a game of chance" (pp. 334-35).

[7] Lawrence Durrell, Columbia Essays on Modern Writers, 6 (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1964), p. 19.

[8] The Interpretation of Otherness: Literature, Religion, and the American Imagination (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 187.

[9] A Key to Modern British Poetry (Norman, Oklahoma: University of Nebraska Press, 1952), p. 3.

[10] Durrell, p. 29.

[11] Durrell, p. 25.

[12] Durrell, p. 30.

[13] "Against Dryness: A Polemical Sketch," 23.

[14] Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 85.

[15] John Dewey, in Art as Experience, expresses the same opinion: "We cannot grasp any idea, any organ of mediation, we cannot possess it in its full force, until we have felt and sensed it, as much as if it were an odor or a color" (p. 119).

[16] Pragmatism, based primarily on the works of two American philosophers, Charles Sanders Peirce and William James, has become a peculiarly American school of philosophy even though, as John Dewey points out in "The Development of American Pragmatism," a chapter in his Philosophy and Civilization (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1931), the term pragmatism was suggested to Peirce by the study of Kant. Dewey says that pragmatism, in Kant's definition of the term, "applies to the rules of art and technique which are based on experience and are applicable to experience" (p. 13). Peirce applies the term to all concepts so that, according to Dewey, "In order to be able to attribute a meaning to concepts, one must be able to apply them to existence. Now it is by means of action that this application is made possible" (p. 15).

[17] Williams, "Belly Music," 27.

[18] Williams, "To Write American Poetry," 12.

[19] Williams' view of intelligence seems similar to that view held by "instrumentalists" as they are described by Dewey in "The Development of American Pragmatism" in Philosophy and Civilization (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1931):

> Briefly, the point of departure of this theory is the conception of the brain as an organ for the co-ordination of sense stimuli (to which one should add modifications caused by habit, unconscious memory, or what are called today "conditioned reflexes") for the purpose of effecting appropriate motor responses. On the basis of the theory of organic evolution it is maintained that the analysis of intelligence and of its operations should be compatible with the order of known biological facts, concerning the intermediate position occupied by the central nervous system in making possible responses to the environment adequate to the needs of the living organism. (p. 27)

Dewey sees that a major consequence of such a view of intelligence is that "A limited perceptual judgment, adapted to the situation which has given it birth, is as true in its place as the most complete and significant philosophic or scientific judgment" (p. 31).

[20] "A Poetry of Things: Williams, Rilke, Ponge," in Comparative Literature, 17 (1965), 312.

[21] The connection between Williams' views and pragmatism is evident in that William James's writings have, in John Dewey's opinion, "destructive implications for monistic rationalism and for absolutism in all its forms" ("The Development of American Pragmatism," p. 26).

[22] The importance of this statement is revealed in the number of times Williams mentions it. See pp. 20, 68, and 143 of EK, and ARI, p. 109.

[23] Williams, "The Reader Critic," in The Little Review, 9:1 (Autumn, 1922), 59-60.

[24] "The Metaphysical Poets," Selected Essays, pp. 287-88.

[25] "Heaven's First Law," p. 72.

[26] Although Whitehead says that art "mirrors the world" (p. 93), he does recognize that in presenting rather than analyzing things and events art can reveal a depth of understanding greater than that found through analysis. Using the example of Wordsworth ("The brooding, immediate presences of things are an obsession to Wordsworth" [p. 93]), Whitehead argues that nature is self-explanatory:

> We have to search whether nature does not in its very being show itself as self-explanatory. By this I mean, that the sheer statement, of what things are, may contain elements explanatory of why things are. Such elements may be expected to refer to depths beyond anything which we can grasp with a clear apprehension. (p. 94)

According to Whitehead, art can, through the presentation of an event, reveal the intrinsic value of that event itself:

> Remembering the poetic rendering of our concrete experience, we see at once that the element of value, of being valuable, of having value, of being an end in itself, of being something which is for its own sake, must not be omitted in any account of an event as the most concrete actual something. 'Value' is the word I use for the intrinsic reality of an event. Value is an element which permeates through and through the poetic view of nature. (p. 95)

[27] Whitehead, p. 97.

[28] See Einstein, p. 281.

[29] See Dijkstra, Cubism, p. 70. Dijkstra says:

> . . . the Cubists had not been satisfied with the conventional method of representing objects as the eye sees them. They so modulated the element of visual perception that in looking at their paintings one saw more in an instant than one could experience in an instant of everyday life. Instead of showing only the side of an object turned to the spectator, the Cubists recreated the object in its entirety, trying to give the viewer a more comprehensive, instantaneous understanding of the complex of form that gives a bowl its quality of being a bowl; they tried to present a new, more intense view of reality.

[30] Northrop Frye, in The Great Code: The Bible and Literature (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1982), explains that the actions of gods are metaphors for actions on earth (p. 31): "But mythology is not a direct response to the natural environment; it is part of the imaginative insulation that separates us from that environment" (p. 37).

[31] Quoted in Wasson, 460-61.

[32] Williams, quoted in Thirlwall, p. 253.

[33] Williams in a letter to Warren Allen Smith, 25 March 1956, quoted in Mariani, p. 723.

Chapter 4

[1] See James Gindin, "The Tradition of Compassion," in Harvest of a Quiet Eye: The Novel of Compassion (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. 1-27. Williams' desire to view things "with

sympathetic impulses at work" is similar to the desire of the novelists who Gindin says belong to the "tradition of compassion." These novelists, like Williams, have no faith in "universal truth":

> Fiction within this tradition challenges the critical assumption --one that goes back at least as far as the works of Aristotle-- that the artistic work dealing with the "universal" is superior to the work dealing with the "particular." Deriving from an attitude dubious about the possibility of asserting any universal qualities, the fiction of compassion frequently concentrates on the particulars of experience, reaches its audience through the relevance and intensity of its depiction of separate and thematically inconclusive aspects of experience. In Aristotelean terms, philosophy, which examines the implications of universal human experience, is a study superior to history, which records the separate facts of experience. But the fiction of compassion, likely to deviate from Aristotelean or paradigmatic models, implicitly rejects the judgment entailed in superiority, and exercises skepticism about the study of philosophy as a means of extracting universal truth for man. (p. 2)

In "the tradition of compassion," the novelist does not "arrange his characters and events to shape a moral injunction to his readers" (p. 3); rather, he attempts to render "a multiplicity of concrete experience" (p. 5).

[2] Miller, p. 288.

[3] See Doyle, William Carlos Williams and the American Poem (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 145.

[4] "The Wanderer and the Dance: William Carlos Williams' Early Poetics," in The Shaken Realist: Essays in Modern Literature in Honor of Frederick J. Hoffman, eds. Melvin J. Friedman and John B. Vickery (Baton Rouge: Louisianna State University Press, 1970), p. 50. Also, Whitehead describes how any organism is simultaneously itself and part of its environment, gaining its identity from that environment while asserting its own being:

> That which endures is limited, obstructive, intolerant, infecting its environment with its own aspects. But it is not self-sufficient. The aspects of all things enter into its very nature. It is only itself as drawing together into its own limitation the larger whole in which it finds itself. Conversely, it is only itself by lending its aspects to this same environment in which it finds itself. (p. 96)

[5] "The Wanderer and the Dance," p. 69.

[6] Nature, in Selected Prose and Poetry, 2nd ed., ed. Reginald L. Cook (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 6.

[7] Escape from the Self: A Study in Contemporary American Poetry and Poetics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), p. 166.

[8] Durrell, p. 5.

[9] Knowledge and Experience, p. 141.

[10] Knowledge and Experience, p. 151.

[11] Eliot, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," says, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (p. 17). But Richard Wasson (p. 473) says Thomas Pynchon points out that "playing roles" is "not the same thing 'as seeing the other fellow's "point of view."'"

[12] "An Introduction to William Carlos Williams," in Repossessing and Renewing: Essays in the Green American Tradition (Baton Rouge: Louisianna State University Press, 1976), p. 188.

[13] Adventures in Ideas, qouted on Doyle, p. 69.

[14] Doyle, p. 120.

[15] Durrell, p. 21.

[16] Durrell, p. 26.

[17] Durrell, p. 29.

[18] Durrell, pp. 29-30.

[19] Unterecker, p. 19.

[20] Williams, "Belly Music," 28.

[21] Whitehead, in criticizing modern cities, says:

> The two evils are: one, the ignoration of the true relation of each organism to its environment; and the other, the habit of ignoring the intrinsic worth of the environment which must be allowed its weight in any consideration of final ends. (p. 196)

[22] "Heaven's First Law," in William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage, ed. Charles Doyle, p. 71.

[23] Whitaker, William Carlos Williams (New York: Twayne, 1968), p. 18.

[24] Riddel, The Inverted Bell, p. 135.

[25] Williams, quoted in Weaver, William Carlos Williams: The American Background (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 63.

[26] Miller, p. 135. See also, John Dewey, "The Development of American Pragmatism," in his Philosophy and Civilization (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1931). Dewey says that William James's lectures on pragmatism, published in 1907, show that

> . . . Monism is equivalent to a rigid universe where everything is fixed and immutably united to others, where indetermination, free choice, novelty, and the unforeseen in experience have no place; a universe which demands the sacrifice of the concrete and complex diversity of things to the simplicity and nobility of an architectural structure. In what concerns our beliefs, Monism demands a rationalistic temperament leading to a fixed and dogmatic attitude. Pluralism, on the other hand, leaves room for contingence, liberty, novelty, and gives complete liberty of action to the empirical method, which can be indefinitely extended. It accepts unity where it finds it, but it does not attempt to force the vast diversity of events and things into a single rational mold. (pp. 19-20)

Dewey himself believes, "If a man cherishes novelty, risk, opportunity and a variegated esthetic reality, he will certainly reject any belief in Monism, when he clearly perceives the import of this system" (p. 21).

[27] Knowledge and Experience, p. 19.

[28] Knowledge and Experience, p. 18.

[29] Knowledge and Experience, p. 77.

[30] Knowledge and Experience, p. 31.

[31] "Vorticism," in The Modern Tradition, eds. Richard Ellmann and Charles Feidelson (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1965), p. 150. Quoted in Charles Altieri, "Objective Image and Act of Mind in Modern Poetry," PMLA, 91:1 (Jan. 1976), 110.

[32] See Malkoff, pp. 31-34.

[33] William Carlos Williams: An American Artist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 44-45.

[34] Gunn, The Interpretation of Otherness: Literature, Religion, and the American Imagination (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), p. 187, refers to John Bettis's Phenomenology of Religion (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 203.

[35] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 11.

[36] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 21.

[37] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 73.

[38] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 45.

[39] Jefferson and/or Mussolini, p. 99.

[40] Gunn, p. 176.

[41] Gunn, p. 177.

[42] DeMott, as quoted in Gunn, p. 178.

[43] Williams' views might here be related to Keats's "negative capability" and to Blake's view of love and joy. Both Keats and Blake seek this sacrifice of will that Williams sees in Shakespeare.

[44] Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 128. Quoted in Bogarth-Campbell, p. 3.

[45] Wasson explains:

> To most moderns, the world was a vast buzzing confusion, an array of disconnected particulars, "an extraneous object, full of other extraneous objects" (as Wallace Stevens put it), and only the poetic imagination using metaphor could supply the world with order and meaning. For example, both Cleanth Brooks and I. A. Richards, for all their disagreements, saw metaphor as a way of reconciling opposites. Experience was full of paradoxes and contingencies which the great poet ordered through metaphor. (p. 462)

[46] "Objective Image and Act of Mind," 103-104.

[47] The Twenties: American Writing in the Postwar Decade, rev. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 211.

[48] Pound, while he calls for "Direct treatment of the 'thing' whether subjective or objective," says also that ". . . the natural object is always the adequate symbol." See "A Retrospect," in Literary Essays, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1954), pp. 3 and 5.

[49] "Hamlet," in Selected Essays, p. 145.

[50] Miller, p. 8.

Chapter 5

[1] Eliot and Einstein both see language as an integral part of culture. Eliot, in Notes towards the Definition of Culture, says:

> Now it is obvious that one unity of culture is that of the people who live together and speak the same language: because

> speaking the same language means thinking, and feeling, and having emotions, rather differently from people who use a different language. (pp. 120-21)

Einstein concurs with both Eliot and Williams:

> Thus we may conclude that the mental development of the individual and his way of forming concepts depend to a high degree upon language. This makes us realize to what extent the same language means the same mentality. In this sense thinking and language are linked together. (p. 336)

[2] Doyle, p. 39.

[3] Bozarth-Campbell, p. 3.

[4] Bruns, p. 218.

[5] Bruns, p. 190.

[6] Knowledge and Experience, p. 132.

[7] Rossi (p. 13) says that Edward Sapir's and Benjamin Whorf's hypothesis that ". . . the language spoken influences the speaker's thinking, perception, and behavior" is still a debatable issue amongst anthropologists. But Rossi concedes: "From a methodological point of view, language can be used to study the totality of culture. In fact, language is the most clearly discernible and self-contained of all cultural factors and is governed by precise phonological, grammatical and syntactical rules."

[8] Matthiessen, p. 32.

[9] Matthiessen, p. 30.

[10] Matthiessen, p. 31.

[11] Emerson, quoted in Matthiessen, p. 33.

[12] Thoreau, in a journal entry from 1859, quoted in Matthiessen, p. 83.

[13] Coleridge, as quoted in Matthiessen, p. 30.

[14] Knowledge and Experience, p. 135.

[15] Knowledge and Experience, p. 132.

[16] Knowledge and Experience, p. 134.

[17] Coleridge makes, as one of the conditions that determine whether pleasure will be derived through reading a given poem, ". . . the apparent naturalness of the representation, as raised and qualified by an

imperceptible infusion of the author's own knowledge and talent, which infusion does, indeed, constitute it an imitation as distinguished from a mere copy." Biographia Literaria, in Poets on Poetry, ed. Charles Norman (New York: The Free Press, 1962), p. 168.

[18] Williams, "A New Line is a New Measure," The New Quarterly of Poetry, 2:2 (Winter, 1947-48), 12.

[19] Miller, pp. 309-10.

[20] "An Approach to the Poem," 52.

[21] "In Praise of Marriage," rev. of The Phoenix and the Turtle, by Kenneth Rexroth, Quarterly Review of Literature, 2:2 (1945), 147.

[22] "An Approach to the Poem," 52.

[23] "An Approach to the Poem," 51.

[24] "An Objective," in Prepositions: The Collected Critical Essays (1967; rpt. New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. 23.

[25] "An Objective," p. 24.

[26] "An Objective," p. 22.

[27] The Inverted Bell, p. 35.

[28] The Variorum Walden, ed. Walter Harding (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 105.

[29] "An Objective," p. 22.

[30] "Motives and Motifs in the Poetry of Marianne Moore," in A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945), p. 487.

[31] "Motives and Motifs," p. 486.

[32] The Poems of William Carlos Williams: A Critical Study (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), p. 74.

[33] Cubism, p. 164.

[34] The Modes of Modern Writing: Metaphor, Metonymy, and the Typology of Modern Literature (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 111.

[35] Miller, p. 306.

[36] Lucifer in Harness: American Meter, Metaphor, and Diction (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 98.

[37] Ostrom, p. 42.

[38] Poetry and Experience (1961; rpt. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1964), p. 23.

[39] Pagany, 1:1 (Winter 1930), 1.

[40] (1928; rpt. New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 116.

[41] Lewis, p. 51.

[42] Davie, p. 23.

[43] "Milton II," in On Poetry and Poets (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 160.

[44] Mariani, p. 570.

[45] "Milton II," p. 160.

Chapter 6

[1] Denise Levertov, The Poet in the World (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 7.

[2] Levertov, p. 14. Levertov says that there are three ways to determine form: one attempts to "contain" the subject, and "to make appropriate re-use of existing metric forms; another attempts to maintain "formlessness"; and the third is organic form (p. 14).

[3] Levertov, p. 9.

[4] Levertov, p. 11.

[5] Levertov, p. 13.

[6] Levertov, p. 10.

[7] Emerson, quoted in Matthiessen.

[8] Williams, in a letter to Kenneth Burke, 24 January 1951, quoted in Mariani, p. 633.

[9] Williams, "Four Foreigners," The Little Review, 6:5 (Sept. 1919), 36.

[10] Williams, "Four Foreigners," 38.

[11] Oppen, quoted in Weaver, p. 55.

[12] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," p. 74.

[13] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," p. 60.

[14] Bozarth-Campbell, pp. 15-16.

[15] Williams in *This Is My Best*, ed. Whit Burnett (New York: Dial, 1942), pp. 641-44. Quoted in Mariani, p. 466.

[16] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," p. 55.

[17] Williams, "Letter to Frances Steloff, March 15, 1939," in *Antaeus* 30/31 (Spring 1978), 24.

[18] *New Quarterly of Poetry*, 2:2 (1947-48), 8-16.

[19] Gertrude Stein, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* ([1933]; rpt. New York: Modern Library, 1962), considers the United States the oldest nation of the world because it was the first nation to be "modern." But her reasons for seeing America as a modern nation are not the same as Williams', which are based on his view of American ideology. Stein says of herself:

> Gertrude Stein always speaks of America as being now the oldest country in the world because by the methods of the civil war and the commercial conceptions that followed it America created the twentieth century, and since all the other countries are now either living or commencing to be living a twentieth century life, America having begun the creation of the twentieth century in the sixties of the nineteenth century is now the oldest country in the world. (p. 73)

[20] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," p. 75.

[21] Williams, "Experimental and Formal Verse," 174.

[22] James Gindin, referring to Robert M. Adams' *Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness* (1958), indicates that there is a relationship between form and society:

> At times, Adams suggests that the formal characteristics of art are related to different views of the world, for a society with a universal or fairly general belief in a philosophy or religion is more likely to create works in a closed form, a fully resolved art reflecting a society that believes its doubts and dilemmas can be resolved. Conversely, a world with no public patterns of belief is more likely to produce as well as to appreciate works with an open form. (p. 8)

[23] Williams, "Notes from a Talk on Poetry," *Poetry* 14:4 (July 1919), 216.

[24] Williams, "Belly Music," 31.

[25] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 51-52.

[26] Williams, "A New Line is a New Measure," p. 11.

[27] Williams, "For a New Magazine," in Blues 1:2 (March 1929), 31.

[28] If an analogy can be drawn between organic form in poetry and living organisms, then, as Alfred North Whitehead explains, forms evolve from and adapt to a new environment: "The general principle is that in a new environment there is an evolution of the old entities into new forms" (p. 109).

[29] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," p. 64.

[30] Williams, "Experimental and Formal Verse," 174.

[31] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 75.

[32] Williams, "Experimental and Formal Verse," 174.

[33] Williams, "An Approach to the Poem," 62.

Chapter 7

[1] "Letter to Frances Steloff," 24.

[2] See The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941, ed. D. D. Paige (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1950), pp. 7-8.

[3] Williams, as quoted in Mariani, p. 70. See also Mariani commentary, pp. 69-71.

[4] Doyle, in his introduction to William Carlos Williams: The Critical Heritage, p. 3.

[5] "Belly Music," 30.

[6] "Notes from a Talk on Poetry," 212.

[7] Lucifer in Harness, p. 24.

[8] "America, Whitman and the Art of Poetry," 29.

[9] "Breaking the Line," Harper's, 263:1579 (Dec. 1981), 55.

[10] "A New Line is a New Measure," 8.

[11] Northrop Frye, in Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), p. 14, says:

> Literature seems to be intermediate between music and painting: its words form rhythms which approach a musical sequence of sounds at one of its boundaries, and form patterns which approach the hieroglyphic or pictorial image at the other. The attempts to get as near to these boundaries as possible form the main body of what is called experimental writing.

[12] "Speech Rhythms" is in Weaver, pp. 82-83.

[13] Mariani, p. 107.

[14] See Miller, p. 300.

[15] Loevy, p. 7.

[16] Schott, in his introduction to Imaginations, p. xiii.

[17] Parsons, "The Art of Process," Nation, 211 (Nov. 23, 1970), 535.

[18] "Process and Product: A Study of Modern Literary Form," The Massachusetts Review, 12 (1971), 316.

In his attitude towards form, the poet who writes a "poetry of process" reveals an attitude similar to the novelist who is part of "the tradition of compassion." Gindon says that the "open form" employed by these novelists expresses an "attempt to approach human experience more directly":

> "Open form," a term recently employed in literary criticism, refers to the form that does not completely enclose the work of art, does not resolve all the central issues suggested by the art. The open form is inconclusive, or only partially conclusive, transmitting the impression that the work of art, like experience itself, cannot resolve, define, or render controllable all the problems and dilemmas man confronts. (p. 6)

[19] (May, 1926), 19 & 29. See Mariani, p. 254, regarding the lawsuit.

[20] William Carlos Williams: An American Artist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 124.

[21] "White Mule versus Poetry," in The Writer, 50:8 (Aug. 1937), 244-45.

[22] Simpson, p. 287.

[23] Kartiganer, 301.

[24] Kartiganer, 297.

[25] Kartiganer, 301.

[26] Levertov, p. 9.

[27] Kartiganer, 308.

[28] Kartiganer, 301.

[29] Letter to Pound, 18 Aug. 1960, quoted in Mariani, p. 759.

[30] "A New Line Is a New Measure," 12.

[31] "A New Line Is a New Measure," 12.

[32] Levertov, p. 19.

[33] "A New Line is a New Measure," 10.

[34] Ezra Pound, in "A Retrospect," an essay included in Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1968), says that one of the basic principles of Imagism is, "As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome" (p. 3).

[35] Doyle, William Carlos Williams and the American Poem, p. 149.

[36] "To Write American Poetry," Fantasy, 5:1 (Summer 1935), 12-13.

[37] "Experimental and Formal Verse," 174.

[38] "How Verse Forms Create Something New," New Republic, 133:18 (Oct. 31, 1955), 16.

[39] Williams to John Thirlwall, quoted in "Ten Years of a New Measure," which is an afterword to PB, p. 183.

[40] "Experimental and Formal Verse," 174.

[41] "How Verse Forms Create Something New," 16.

[42] Mariani, p. 689.

Conclusion

[1] Tropic of Cancer (1934; rpt. New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 208. See Edward J. Rose's essay, "The Aesthetics of Civil Disobedience, Henry Miller, Twentieth Century Transcendentalist," Edge, 1 (Autumn 1963), 5-16.

[2] "The Development of American Pragmatism," 32.

[3] Einstein, p. 102.

[4] "The Development of American Pragmatism," 13.

[5] Lewis, p. 1.

[6] Lewis, p. 23.

[7] "William Carlos Williams' Reply to 'The Situation in American Writing: Seven Questions,'" Partisan Review, 6:4 (Summer, 1939), 43-44.

[8] Einstein, p. 350.

[9] New Poets from Old: A Study in Literary Genetics (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), p. 11.

[10] "The Development of American Pragmatism," 33.

[11] "The Development of American Pragmatism," 33.

[12] Malkoff, p. 90.

[13] Letters for Origin (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1970), p. 10.

[14] Letters for Origin, p. 63.

[15] Letters for Origin, p. 129.

[16] ([1960]; rpt. New York: Vintage Books, 1965), p. 144.

[17] Stephen Stepanchev, in American Poetry since 1945: A Critical Survey ([1965]; rpt. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper Colophon Books, 1967), disapproves of contemporary American poets who, under the influence of Objectivism, "put so much stress on objects, on the 'reification' of poetry, that they neglect people, the creation of character" (p. 209). He also objects to the rejection of the intellect in favor of "bodily and emotional processes that represent only a part of the life of man," and to the lack of "incident, action, plot" in relation to the number of poems that are "series of perceptions" (p. 209). All of the flaws described by Stepanchev might have been caused by Williams' influence, but so might the virtues of contemporary American poetry have resulted from Williams' influence:

> Nevertheless, despite these strictures, one can say that reading contemporary poetry is always an exciting experience, for it offers images of the life one knows, and in the idiom of one's own time: one can see the hand of eternity working in the materials of the present. As for the great struggle over prosody--one can find excellent poems in the books of a traditionalist like Richard Wilbur as well as in the books of such innovators as Denise Levertov and James Wright. However, there is no doubt that the poets who have been working in the new free forms have been more successful than their traditionalist

colleagues in bringing American poetry close to the breath, voice, and pulse of contemporary life. (pp. 209-10)

[18] (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 49.

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